EBRUARY 14, 2005

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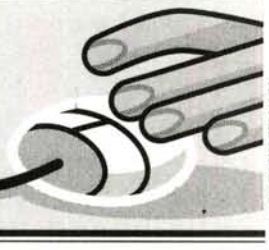
Letters



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

We received much mail from readers offended by Robert Grossman's "Babe Lincoln" (Jan. 24). His cartoon was intended as a comment on the controversy stirred by C.A. Tripp's new book, The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln, *in which Tripp argues that Lincoln was homosexual. We leave historians to debate Tripp's thesis, as we leave readers and Grossman to discuss the cartoon below. We deeply regret having offended anyone.* —*The Editors*

STEREOTYPE BY DAGUERREOTYPE

Katonah, NY

■ Karl Rove himself couldn't have done a better job of conflating liberalism and adolescent vulgarity. Anyone trying *The Nation* as a result of having seen Katrina vanden Heuvel on mainstream TV might regret having done so when they see Robert Grossman's cartoon "Babe Lincoln." THEODORE G. GOETZ

New York City

■ I was surprised to discover that the *Nation* editors don't seem to understand the difference between gender and sexuality. Robert Grossman's "Babe Lincoln" depicts the President decked out in nineteenth-century women's lingerie. The caption jokes that a "newly discovered daguerreotype lends support to theory in a recent book that the sixteenth president was gay." Kind of funny, maybe, but such a daguerreotype would in fact suggest that "Babe Lincoln" (pretty old hat, that) was a cross-dresser rather than a gay man. IRA ELLIOTT

Bethesda, Md.

■ I'm having a problem understanding the "Babe Lincoln" cartoon. The drawing shows a recognizable Lincoln head atop a voluptuous Victorian postcard-porn female body. The text states that the "newly discovered" image lends credence to the suggestion that Lincoln was gay.

Was Lincoln transgendered—a male "trapped" in a female body? Or was he a transvestite, a man who likes to dress up in female clothing (but those cartoon breasts look pretty real, no padding there)? Could he actually have been a hermaphrodite with characteristics of both sexes (although I can't be sure what those pantaloons are really hiding)? Of course, none of these things necessarily equates with homosexuality.

I've been racking my brain trying to figure out how the cartoonist could have visually indicated "gayness" in some other less confusing way. Undoubtedly, however, it too would have been inaccurate and stereotypical. So, can you help me figure this out? Who's confused here—me, Lincoln or the cartoonist?

L.E. MARTINEZ

Dublin, Pa.

■ There may be risible aspects to the recent theory that Abe Lincoln had a homosexual past, but your cartoon is not funny. It's disturbing to find *The Nation* happily perpetuating the old stereotype of male homosexuality as being all about drag. None of that was in C.A. Tripp's book, so far as I know.

What exactly is your point? Do cigar-chomping *Nation* editors really get a kick out of jokes about faggots who act like women? The cartoon isn't just stupid, it's insulting.

STEPHEN C. BANDY

New York City

■ As someone who's written dozens of articles for *The Nation*, including a number on gay issues, I must ask: Didn't you consider that running Robert Grossman's offensive cartoon—bad enough in itself—was made worse by the political context in which we live? We've just come through an election the Republicans won, in part, by bashing gay people over the head with odious stereotypes and discriminatory referendums. That makes running this cartoon, which pretends that a man who loves a man really wants to be a woman—the oldest canard in the world—even more insulting.

DOUG IRELAND

New York City

■ I'm sure I'm not the only person who finds your Abe Lincoln cartoon deeply and painfully insulting. What you mistake for humor is nothing more than virulent and blatant homophobic garbage, utterly unworthy of the 140-year-old magazine entrusted to your care. It's this kind of ignorant stereotyping that fuels and perpetuates hatred, disgust and violence against homosexuals. I'm embarrassed for you.

JOHN BERENDT

Los Angeles

■ Besides not being funny—a serious sin, as Oscar Wilde might have pointed out—the "Babe Lincoln" cartoon is fairly offensive in its knee-jerk association between "gay" and "woman in man's body" or whatever yuck-yuck image Robert Grossman intends. While I have no desire to defend Tripp's apparently fairly careless and tendentious "historical" argument, this sort of joke adds nothing of import to the issue raised by those claims. And the "Log Cabin Republicans take note" makes no sense at all, beyond the obvious fact that they (poor deluded souls) are gay Republicans.

This is, unfortunately, not an atypical lapse in taste. LARRY GROSS, *director*
Annenberg School for Communication
University of Southern California

New York City

■ As a friend and admirer of Bob Grossman and a collector of his work, I felt deeply offended by the the letters on your website from some of your readers about Bob's "Babe Lincoln" cartoon. Their implication that an artist—especially in his case a political, social and cultural critic—should be constrained by rules of taste, political correctness and propriety is offensive to common sense and damaging to freedom.

And what's even worse, it seems that those advocates of censorship see themselves as "liberals." It's worrisome that a mild, sweetly funny and even affectionate take on Lincoln's alleged gayness should cause such a rabid response. JORGE PONTUAL

GROSSMAN REPLIES

New York City

■ When I read a review in the *New York Times* of C.A. Tripp's *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln*, the words "Babe Lincoln" suddenly ran through my mind, rendering me helpless. In the impoverished mental landscape of a cartoonist this is what passes for true inspiration. I knew that gay men were not necessarily effeminate, cross-dressers or bearded ladies but I couldn't let that prevent me from having my laugh. Better a cheap and infantile joke than no joke at all, or so I thought. Now I hereby apologize to anyone I have offended. I also want to thank the editors of *The Nation* for their playfulness and/or insensitivity in allowing my perky pin-up to get into print.

Somebody asked me about the ax in the picture. It was a contemporary symbol of Lincoln. Although now I've read that he may not ever have split any rails. Somehow I thought it would make my picture a little more edgy.

ROBERT GROSSMAN

A DIFFERENT IRAQ PERSPECTIVE

Los Angeles

■ Naomi Klein wrote in her "Lookout" column "You Break It, You Pay for It" [Jan. 10/17]: "As for preventing 'anarchy,' the US plan to bring elections to Iraq seems designed to spark a civil war—the civil war needed to justify an ongoing presence for US troops no matter who wins the elections."

I am an American, recently returned from the Middle East, where I met several of my Egyptian physician friends who have been working in Baghdad for a year and a half. There is a feeling and a belief in Iraq and the Middle East in general—which Klein and others are missing—that, yes indeed, the entire debacle in Iraq is

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PRINTED JANUARY 26 VOLUME 280, NUMBER 6

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EDITORIALS

Models of Opposition

George W. Bush's hopes of launching his second term with a new Secretary of State in place and a new Attorney General very nearly so were dashed when the two senior Democrats in the Senate decided not to go along. Senator Robert Byrd, the dean of the chamber, pulled the brakes on the Condoleezza Rice confirmation because, he said, the Senate ought to take seriously its constitutional responsibility to review the nomination of a new Secretary of State, particularly in light of Rice's role in promoting the invasion of Iraq. At the same time, Senator Edward Kennedy, ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, arranged for the delay of a planned vote on the nomination of Alberto Gonzales, who was responsible for a memo that provided an Administration green light for torture.

These actions—coming as they did after Barbara Boxer's lone stand in the Senate against accepting Ohio's electors because of allegations of widespread irregularities, and Senate Foreign Relations Committee votes by Boxer and John Kerry against Rice—outraged the Republicans. Senator Jon Kyl called them "churlish," while Senator John Warner grumbled that Democrats would not win "any merit badges."

So be it. Democrats aren't supposed to be collecting merit badges. They're supposed to be representing the tens of millions of Americans who object to this Administration's policies—including the President's determination to promote officials associated with some of the worst misdeeds of his first term.

Ultimately, the delaying of the Rice and Gonzales confirmations represents only a minor revolt. The full GOP-dominated Senate approved Rice on January 26 and was poised to do the same for Gonzales, after a10-to-8 party-line vote in the Judiciary Committee. But we hope the delays are a sign of more important revolts to come. Opposition that is both aggressive and substantive will be essential in preventing the packing of courts with foes of abortion rights, the filling of regulatory positions such as the chairmanship of the FCC with acolytes of the industries they're supposed to constrain, the destruction of Social Security and Medicare, and further military disasters.

Some Democrats understand the job of an opposition party. Among them are the new Democratic Senate whip, Illinoian Dick Durbin, profiled on page 11, and Congressman Henry Waxman of California, profiled on page 16, both of whom recognize that the rules by which Congress, particularly the Senate, governs itself were designed to allow an opposition party with substantial popular support to delay and even defeat the will of a President and his party. They're also fighters who don't let caution prevail over principle, and who do their homework. Durbin voted against the Iraq War during his first (and successful) re-election campaign, a vote he calls "the most important vote that I ever cast in twenty-two years of service on Capitol Hill." Waxman found ways in the first Bush term, despite being in the minority, to investigate Administration outrages ranging from overcharges in Halliburton contracts in Iraq to the peddling of false sex-education information to teens—actions that led fellow Congressman George Miller to describe him as having developed the model for what others should do: "Ask questions, be persistent and not accept silence."

The point, as Durbin and Waxman know, is not to obstruct but to oppose; the American people will recognize the difference. If Democrats get the hang of their opposition role, George Bush's Inaugural Day disappointments will be only the beginning of a frustrating second term.

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COMMENT

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The Nation (ISSN 0027-8378) is published weekly (except for the second week in January, and biweekly the third week of July through the second week of September) by The Nation Company, L.P. © 2005 in the U.S.A. by The Nation Company, L.P., 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. (212) 209-5400. Washington Bureau: Suite 308, 110 Maryland Avenue N.E., Washington, DC 20002. (202) 546-2239. *Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices.* Subscription orders, changes of address and all subscription inquiries: The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149, or call 1-800-333-8536. Publications Mail Agreement No: 40041477. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to Circulation Dept. or DPGM, 4960-2 Walker Road, Windsor, ON N9A 6J3. **When ordering a subscription, please allow 4-6 weeks for receipt of your first issue and for all subscription transactions.** Back issues $4 prepaid ($6 foreign) from: The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. The Nation is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149. Printed in U.S.A. on recycled paper.

INTERNET: Selections from the current issue become available Thursday night at www.thenation.com.

'Freedom' Belongs to All

George W. Bush's second inaugural address cynically invoked noble ideals for ignoble ends. In the course of twenty minutes, Bush used the words "free," "freedom" and "liberty" no fewer than forty-nine times. Freedom lies at the heart of American political culture, and as groups from abolitionists to modern-day conservatives have realized, it gives legitimacy to political goals of all kinds. The historic rallying cry of the dispossessed, freedom can also be what the philosopher Nikolas Rose calls a "formula of power." Bush speaks of freedom to justify both the invasion of Iraq—at a time when all other justifications have been discredited—and a conservative agenda at home.

Almost from the moment the twin towers fell, Bush has wrapped himself in the language of freedom. "They hate our freedom" became the all-purpose explanation for the attack itself and for subsequent worldwide disapproval of the Administration's Iraq policy. The National Security Strategy of 2002, which announced the doctrine of pre-emptive war, opened with the statement that freedom, as Americans understand it, is "right and true for every person, in every society." No variations and no exceptions.

Bush's speechwriters have been reading American history. His address paraphrased some of the most celebrated orations in the nation's past, especially those delivered during wars, hot and cold. It echoed Lincoln's second inaugural, the messianic addresses of Woodrow Wilson during World War I, FDR's Four Freedoms speech, the Truman Doctrine address to Congress, and Kennedy's inaugural. Like Ronald Reagan, who loved to quote Tom Paine, Bush is a master at appropriating for conservative ends language associated with his opponents.

In some ways Bush's rhetoric has become more conciliatory. "Tyranny" has replaced the "axis of evil," the post-9/11 phrase that so alarmed the world. Perhaps hoping to prepare Americans for the likelihood that an Iraqi government dominated by Shiites will not call to mind Jeffersonian democracy, the speech disavowed the idea of imposing "our own style of government" on others. It rejected the idea of America as a "chosen nation." Nonetheless, in the hubris of its assumption that the United States stands for unalloyed freedom and the divine right to remake the world, Bush's address embodied the very outlook he claimed to repudiate.

The President's actual policies, of course, belie his rhetoric. During the cold war, the "free world" included Latin American strongmen, dictators like the Shah of Iran and the rulers of apartheid South Africa. Today, talk of combating tyranny does not, it appears, apply to undemocratic allies in the "war on terror," such as Egypt, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, or to oil-rich former Soviet republics like Uzbekistan, where the United States has established military bases. It ignores how our own civil liberties have eroded during his presidency.

Bush's paean to democracy ignores the inconvenient fact that nearly every member of the "coalition of the willing" joined the invasion of Iraq in defiance of the will of its own people. Borrowing from FDR, Bush recognizes that "laboring on the edge of subsistence" undermines freedom. Yet he opposes measures like raising the minimum wage, strengthening labor unions and limit-

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COMMENT

ing the outsourcing of jobs to low-wage countries that would do much more to enhance "freedom from want" than the privatization of Social Security. The claim that the United States embodies the ideal of freedom in a titanic struggle with evil may be an effective means of mobilizing public support, but it makes it impossible to interpret international criticism of the United States as anything but hostility to freedom.

Despite Bush's talk of "America's ideal of freedom," no single American definition has ever existed. Freedom by its very nature is a contested concept, to which different individuals and groups have imparted different meanings. The dominant definition today, a combination of political democracy, unregulated free enterprise and freedom of choice in personal matters, is the product of a particular historical moment, not a timeless set of principles. There are other American traditions that see freedom as resting on social responsibility both to guarantee every citizen's economic security and to achieve justice for those long denied genuine equality. Bush's critics should not cede to him the language of freedom, or act as if he has a monopoly on its meaning. ERIC FONER

Eric Foner, DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University, is the author of The Story of American Freedom.

Hail-to-the-Chief Show

This Administration may not know how to rule the world, but it sure can run a ritual. No President in recent history has been so adept at using pageantry to invest a radical new agenda with the authority of the past. Yet there is always a moment in these ceremonies when the symbolic web of tradition tears, revealing the snarling reality of the present.

In the Bush inaugural, that moment came when the presidential motorcade headed down Pennsylvania Avenue enclosed in a phalanx of police vehicles. "It looked like a military occupation proceeding through a hostile city," snapped ABC's George Will. Only after the event did we learn just how martial it was. Along with 13,000 officers, secret commando units were at large in Washington, and sharpshooters with state-of-the-art assault weapons were stationed on rooftops along the parade route. The President was riding in an armored limo with bulletproof tires and, reportedly, an oxygen system that could be activated during a chemical attack. None of this showed on TV. In the new surveillance society, nothing is more important than maintaining the illusion of normalcy.

TV commentators play an important part in this arrangement. They must reconcile the signs of ominous activity with the smooth surface. On Inauguration Day, that meant duly noting the barriers, checkpoints and protest cages while regarding them as a rational response to terrorism—a tad paranoid, at worst. If anything, the locked and loaded ambience gave weight to Bush's speech, with its exhortation to endless war in the name of freedom and security. No pundit pointed out that this exercise in control was also a pretext for staging the most tightly managed inauguration in American history. Hundreds of thousands of spectators thought they were participating in a public event, when in fact they were extras on a giant set. Not even Goebbels could have imagined such a theater of actuality, but then, he didn't live in the era of reality TV.

When W. finally left his tank to walk a block or so, he strolled past a select crowd of admirers who had paid up to $300 for their VIP bleacher seats. The few demonstrators who managed to lob hostile comments within official range were hauled away, off camera. These protesters "rattling their cages," as Peter Jennings put it, were "in the great American tradition." Instead of focusing on their confinement, television presented their dissent as a tribute to democracy. Instead of addressing the racist taint of having Trent Lott host this event, the media focused on the many mentions of the civil rights struggle in the President's remarks. Every detail, down to W.'s dance with a black female soldier at a ball ("This is special," Barbara Walters gushed), had been calculated to send a certain message. This inaugural was about giving an aggressive, repressive agenda the aura of greatness. That's why the President's speech was laced with allusions to renowned orations—and the pundits bought it. George Stephanopoulos detected "echoes of Kennedy and Lincoln." Terry Moran found "echoes of the King James Bible." Wolf Blitzer "heard a lot of Ronald Reagan." This rhetoric, borrowed from a wine tasting, was the perfect patter for a state-run infotainment show.

At night, the anchors took to formalwear, but they didn't get anywhere near the action at the inaugural balls. Nothing was allowed to mar the pretense of dignified solemnity. And the press was barred from the dinners and receptions where the real story unfolded. You'd think the prerogatives of news gathering would trump this haves-only protocol, but no reporter crashed the gathering for the Mississippi delegation sponsored by military contractors or the blast for "Young Republican fundraisers" produced by the pharmaceutical industry and Taser International. Instead, there was the usual clucking over the attributes of the First Lady's

CALVIN TRILLIN

We Could Have Danced All Night

(The Bushes Do "My Fair Lady" at the Inaugural Balls)

We could have danced all night,
We could have danced all night,
And still had fat cats who
We hadn't thanked at all
For backing us last fall,
Though soon, we're sure, they'll get their due.
There're those who'd say to dance this way is
tasteless
While we lose soldiers day and night.
But no one here would know a fallen GI Joe.
So we can dance, dance, dance all night.

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wardrobe and the quality of the inaugural cuisine. Not that controversy was entirely absent from the festivities. Much was made of kracker-rapper and proud Republican Kid Rock's exclusion from the official youth concert (though nothing better describes Bush's economic agenda than the Kid's observation that "there's only two types of men/pimps and johns"). Of course, the real provocation came from the President's address, whose meaning for the world was epitomized by Texas Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison in her comments to FOX News: "We want our quality of life for you, and we're willing to fight for it."

Hovering over this extravaganza was the aura of something new and disturbing. It was in the song by John Ashcroft trilled from the Capitol steps, the one about letting "the eagle soar like she's never soared before." It was in the boast by Billy Graham, "In Your providence You have granted a second term." It was in the eerie tone of armed revelry and secret ceremony. Under the pomp and circumstance, one could glimpse the contours of the coming American security state. Political pageants are like that. They show the future disguised as the past. RICHARD GOLDSTEIN

Richard Goldstein writes about the connections among pop culture, politics and sexuality.

In Fact . . .

NATION NOTES

■ We are delighted to announce that Lee Siegel, whose review of David Thomson is on page 29, will serve as a regular book critic for the magazine. Lee's pungent, irreverent prose has appeared in publications from the *New York Times* and *The New Yorker* to *Radical History Review* and *Tikkun*. He also writes on television for *The New Republic* and on art for *Slate*. Lee will contribute essays on fiction and nonfiction books. • Recognizing the importance of cartoons and other graphic forms of commentary, we start in this issue a regular feature called *Comix Nation*.

PASSINGS

■ John L. Hess, who died on January 21 at 87, contributed more than twenty articles to this magazine. A series he wrote on Social Security is as fresh today as when it appeared in 1990. John was a dissident; he was not, however, "cranky," as the *New York Times*, where he was a reporter for twenty-five years, said in an obituary. A soft-spoken, witty, almost courtly man, he enjoyed good food and watching spaghetti westerns. But you didn't let that pleasant surface fool you: He was fiercely committed to progressive beliefs—a source of contretemps between him and various editors at the *Times*, from which he prematurely retired in 1978. His career is engagingly recounted in his last book, *My* Times*: A Memoir of Dissent*, which should be a required journalism school text on how not to be an organization man. • We also note the loss of another *Nation* friend, economist Robert Heilbroner, a superb popularizer in the best sense, who gave us articles on subjects as varied as Clintonomics and the future of socialism, always in lucid, down-to-earth prose.

ON THE WEB

■ Alisa Solomon reports from Brazil on the World Social Forum; Jim Schultz from Bolivia on the World Bank and water: www.thenation.com.

Chertoff and Torture

Back on Friday, June 12, 2002, the Defense Department had a big problem: Its new policy on torture of captives in the "war on terror" was about to be exposed. John Walker Lindh, the young Californian captured in Afghanistan in December 2001 and touted by John Ashcroft as an "American Taliban," was scheduled to take the stand the following Monday in an evidence suppression hearing regarding a confession he had signed. There he would tell, under oath, about how he signed the document only after being tortured for days by US soldiers. Federal District Judge T.S. Ellis had already said he was likely to allow Lindh, at trial, to put on the stand military officers and even Guantánamo detainees who were witnesses to or participants in his alleged abuse.

The Defense Department, which we now know had in late 2001 begun a secret, presidentially approved program of torture of Afghan and Al Qaeda captives at Bagram Air Base and other locations, had made it clear to the Justice Department that it wanted the suppression hearing blocked. American torture at that point was still just a troubling rumor, and the Bush Administration clearly wanted to keep it that way. Accordingly, Michael Chertoff, who as head of the Justice Department's criminal division was overseeing all the department's terrorism prosecutions, had his prosecution team offer a deal. All the serious charges against Lindh—terrorism, attempted murder, conspiracy to kill Americans, etc.—would be dropped and he could plead guilty just to the technical charges of "providing assistance" to an "enemy of the U.S." and of "carrying a weapon." Lindh, whose attorneys dreaded his facing trial in one of the most conservative court districts in the country on the first anniversary of 9/11, had to accept a stiff twenty-year sentence, but that was half what he faced if convicted on those two minor charges alone.

But Chertoff went further, according to one of Lindh's attorneys, George Harris. Chertoff (now an appeals court judge in New Jersey) demanded—reportedly at Defense Department insistence, according to what defense attorneys were told—that Lindh sign a statement swearing he had "not been intentionally mistreated" by his US captors and waiving any future right to claim mistreatment or torture. Further, Chertoff attached a "special administrative measure," essentially a gag order, barring Lindh from talking about his experience for the duration of his sentence.

At the time, few paid attention to this peculiar silencing of Lindh. In retrospect, though, it seems clear that the man coasting toward confirmation as Secretary of Homeland Security effectively prevented early exposure of the Bush/Rumsfeld/Gonzales policy of torture, which we now know began in Afghanistan and later "migrated" to Guantánamo and eventually to Iraq. So anxious was Chertoff to avoid exposure in court of Lindh's torture—which included keeping the seriously wounded and untreated Lindh, who was malnourished and dehydrated, blindfolded and duct-taped to a stretcher for days in an unheated and unlit shipping container, and repeatedly threatening him with death—that defense lawyers say he made the deal a limited-time offer. "It was good only if we accepted it before the suppression hearing," says Harris. "They said if the hearing occurred, all deals were off." He adds, "Chertoff

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COMIX NATION

SOCIAL SECURITY
A Fairy Tale

Once upon a time, a devilish little chicken got it in his head to shout...
THE SKY IS FAILING!
THE SKY IS FAILING!
He terrified the other birds telling them the only safe place for their nest eggs was the livestock market.
HURRY! THERE'S NO TIME TO LOSE!!
Little Chicken convinced the farm to give the eggs to the Three Little Pigs. They worked in a straw house down on Wall Street...
NOW YOU FELLAS WILL TREAT 'EM LIKE THEY WERE YOUR OWN, RIGHT?
WINK WINK
YOU BET!
The pigs invested the eggs in the Three Bears Soup stock.*
THIS STOCK IS HOT!
WAIT--IT'S TURNED COLD
OH, NO! IT'S BEEN ALL EATEN UP!!
Rumor has it that Goldielocksman Sachs was complicit, but she was never prosecuted.
The Three Blind Mice were hired to explain to the outraged chickens how all their nest eggs had been lost...
WE COULDN'T HAVE SEEN THIS COMING.
THERE'S NOBODY TO BLAME.
ANYWAY--QUIT COMPLAINING--
AT LEAST YOU STILL HAVE YOUR TAILS!
And as the farm sank in a sea of debt, the Butcher, Baker and Little Chicken comfortably floated away in a golden tub.
BURP! THAT OMELET WAS GOOD MR. ROVE!
WHAT SHALL I COOK UP NEXT MR. CHENEY?
HOW ABOUT CHICKEN?

Peter Kuper

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COMMENT

himself was clearly the person at Justice to whom the line prosecutors were reporting. He was directing the whole plea agreement process, and there was at least one phone call involving him."

"It is outrageous that Chertoff didn't allow testimony about Lindh's torture by American forces to come out," says Michael Ratner, president of the Center for Constitutional Rights. "It is off the charts in terms of morality, and it should definitely be a line of questioning at Chertoff's confirmation hearing: What did he know about Lindh's treatment in Afghanistan, and why did he go to such lengths to silence him about it?" But that might never happen at Chertoff's (as yet unscheduled) hearing, since the ranking Democrat on the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, Joe Lieberman, has endorsed the nomination.

Chertoff's judicial office is referring all inquires to the White House press office. Calls there and to the Justice Department, asking for comment, were not returned.

Ratner says Chertoff's role in the Lindh trial could well have contributed to the torture scandal that has so undermined the US effort to win over Iraqis following the invasion of their country. "Had testimony from witnesses under oath about Lindh's torture come out in court in 2002, we might have learned about the government's torture program earlier, and we might not have had Abu Ghraib and other torture scandals," he says. DAVE LINDORFF

Dave Lindorff, a longtime Nation *contributor, is the author of* This Can't Be Happening: Resisting the Disintegration of American Democracy *(see www.thiscantbehappening.net).*

Battling the Pentagon

On issues of war and peace, progressives should take heart from the fact that no matter how aggressive the Bush Administration's intentions may be, its ability to carry them out is likely to be severely circumscribed in a second term.

In the wake of the November elections, arms control and peace advocates scored an important victory when Congress eliminated funding for research on new nuclear weapons, including $27.6 million for the macho-sounding Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator. The leader in this effort was Republican Representative David Hobson. In another promising sign, the Pentagon took advantage of the slow news week between Christmas and New Year's to leak its plans to cut $30 billion from more than a dozen weapons programs in the next five years. The cuts amount to only a little over 1 percent of the $2.5 trillion planned for the Pentagon's total budget over the next five years, and some represent little more than a budget shell game; as Lawrence Korb of the Center for American Progress points out, the Pentagon plans to buy one Virginia-class attack submarine per year for the next five years instead of two, but it still plans to buy the same total number. And other proposed cuts may be stopped in their tracks by the arms lobby, once interested members of Congress from Texas, Georgia and beyond team up with contractors like Lockheed Martin to save home-state systems like the F-22 fighter and the C-130J transport plane.

But even allowing for these limitations, the fact that the Pentagon felt compelled to offer any cuts at all provides an important opportunity to debate national security priorities. Budget deficits are running at $300 billion to $400 billion per year, even before accounting for the $2 trillion, ten-year cost of the plan for partial privatization of Social Security. And there is little possibility of postponing budget tradeoffs by throwing more billions onto our national credit card. As popular domestic programs come onto the budgetary chopping block, everything will be up for debate.

An equally urgent task is rethinking how national security funds are spent. Much of what is needed to protect against terrorism can be achieved with relatively small, focused investments within the Pentagon budget. Other security priorities fit outside the Pentagon budget altogether. In a report last year, a task force organized by the Institute for Policy Studies and the Security Policy Working Group advocated a shift of approximately $50 billion per year from big-ticket weapons systems like the F-22 and the V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft to programs for securing "loose" nuclear weapons around the world, for nonmilitary foreign aid and for protecting ports, industrial plants and other domestic facilities against possible terrorist attacks. The report targeted many of the same systems involved in the Pentagon's current cuts, but instead of "shaving" them suggested canceling them.

Another area where the Bush Administration may be vulnerable to pressure is in increasing funding to dismantle nuclear weapons and secure or destroy nuclear bomb-making materials in the former Soviet Union. Despite giving rhetorical support for these programs, the Administration's 2005 budget requested only $919 million for Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction programs to carry out this important work, $72 million less than the year before. By contrast, the Administration is still lavishing $10 billion per year on a missile defense program that couldn't even get an interceptor missile out of its silo in a test in early December.

The elephant in the room in any discussion of US military policy is Iraq. The Administration will soon put forward an $80 billion supplemental request for funds for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan with another funding request later this year. This will be on top of the FY 2006 Pentagon budget, estimated at $418 billion, plus $20 billion for the military activities of the Energy Department (mostly nuclear weapons–related work). Political demands to drastically reduce the US presence or simply get out of Iraq will continue to mount as the costs and casualties do.

But even large doses of political and budgetary reality in Iraq will be in competition with the continued taste for grandiosity in the Pentagon, as evidenced by Seymour Hersh's recent revelations of Donald Rumsfeld's covert planning for military strikes on Iranian nuclear/military installations. If Hersh's sources are accurate and these plans move forward, all bets will be off in the face of a reckless adventure whose consequences may take years to play out. All the more reason to speak out now against the notion of covert military action in Iran, and against the idea of empowering the Pentagon to undertake such adventures.

MICHELLE CIARROCCA AND WILLIAM D. HARTUNG

Michelle Ciarrocca is a senior research associate and William D. Hartung is a senior research fellow at the World Policy Institute. Hartung is the author of How Much Are You Making on the War, Daddy? A Quick and Dirty Guide to War Profiteering in the Bush Administration.

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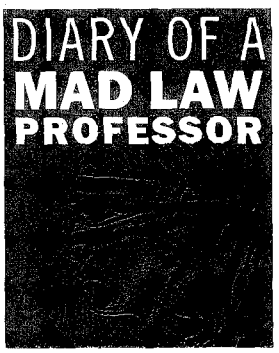
PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

Shrieking Violets



There I was, in the basement of the Margaret Mitchell House in Atlanta, enjoying a private tour of the place. (I was there pushing my great new book, *Open House: Of Family, Friends, Food, Piano Lessons and the Search for a Room of My Own*, just out from Farrar, Straus and Giroux. *The Nation* has a policy of not reviewing its columnists' books, but none against columnists doing so themselves. Hence, the gracelessness of this graceless intervention.) Anyway, Lynda Hawkins, the curator, pointed out a photo of the movie set of *Gone With the Wind*, taken in 1939. There was the grand, pillared facade of Tara, with Vivien Leigh as Scarlett and Clark Gable as Rhett, standing on the porch, surrounded by all the other cast members, including a fanned assortment of black actors impersonating slaves. Sitting cross-legged at Vivien Leigh's feet is none other than Martin Luther King Jr., 10 years old then, who, with other members of the children's choir of his father's church, had been brought in to sing at the premiere of the movie.

It's one of the weirder historical conjunctions I've come across, and I'm still not quite sure what to make of it. Just to round out the who'd-a-thunk-it picture, Ms. Hawkins informed me that in later years Mitchell was a supporter of the civil rights movement, personally intervening to help integrate the police department and setting up a scholarship fund for African-American medical students.

What does one make of this, these two lives so iconic in their own respective corners, yet whose paths are so criss-crossed, even intertwined, if toward distinctly oppositional cultural polarities? The ultimate Southern-belle vehicle cum minstrel show as incidental theatrical launching pad for one of history's greatest spokesmen for human dignity. The Atlanta police department desegregated at least in part because of political pressure exercised by Margaret Mitchell, daughter of a Catholic suffragette, who done birthed Mammy, Melanie, Prissy and Pa. Nothing in life is simple. Indeed, the very surprise I feel is a testament to the endlessness of irony, if not our ability to reinvent ourselves over time.

The week I went to Atlanta was not a high moment for the rosy optimism with which we have tended to shellac our memorials to Dr. King and his aspirations for the Beloved Community. The culture wars have been flaring again, with new intensity, and this time against the backdrop of real wars, frontal assaults on affirmative action and civil rights, a rapidly diminishing sense of trust within the body politic—either domestically or internationally—as well as poisonous disregard for anything like civility.

At Harvard, President Lawrence Summers added to his lengthening list of self-described "provocations" by asserting, at a gathering of biologists, that women just might be genetically hobbled in math and science. The flap that ensued was a civil one, comparatively, with concern that women at Harvard were more hobbled by Summers's own management style than their genes. There was a weariness to the debate: How many times must one prove one's ability, even down to the molecular level?

The debate on my own campus, by contrast, has been anything but weary. Columbia University—like a number of other universities in recent times—has been divided by heated encounters between students and professors on opposite sides of the conflict in the Middle East. These debates have been fiery, with poisonous name-calling. There has been hurtful and overly broad categorization, with lots of conflation of "Israel" and "Zionism" or of specific policies of the Sharon government and Jews generally, of "American" with specific policies of the Bush Administration and, rather ominously I think, a conflation of "fundamentalism" and "left wing," "liberal" and "anti-Semitic" as well as of "academic freedom" and "intolerance." And that's before we get to the calls for firing, expulsion, deportation and death threats. The debate is as seemingly unwinnable and trauma-driven as the war itself. All I will venture to say is that to the extent there is any hope of reconciliation, if just within the bell jar of the campus, it has not been helped by the amplified shrieking of the New York tabloids, whose dehumanizing, sensationalized, zero-sum descriptions make it much harder for the institution to consider these events for the academic issues they raise, i.e., the limits of academic freedom for professors, the ability of students as "purchasers" of education to influence content, the question of whether all courses must be "fair and balanced" or neutral or impartial, and what is truth anyway. Even the usual discussions of whether the First Amendment is absolute or whether we can enforce civility through speech or conduct codes seem to have flown out the window in the heat of this moment. The hoopla and rage have also eclipsed the hypothetically quieter in-house channels of dispute resolution set up to deal with questions of power and claims of harassment.

When I listen to these kinds of discussions of late, I no longer see the venting whose excesses are part of what I understand to be the usual academic or sophomoric viciousness. There is a redefining of in-group and out-group in a way that is rapidly superseding the smaller subjects around which the controversies originally swirled. It's not about political correctness anymore; it's about a rising nationalism that has consequences with teeth. Ideologues—right, left, extreme or moderate—seem to have lost their coherence. Websites that have always denounced "PC-ness" and hate-speech codes have now begun to denounce certain speech as criminal, as genocidal. Equality is described as a dangerous myth. Interning the Japanese was an idea ahead of its time. There are few calls for institutional discipline but rather a running out of town. The dissenter has become a heretic. The grief is contagious. The rage is blind. I wonder what commitment it will take to hew to our principles, to retain a sense of direction in a world that seems to have entirely lost its compass. I hang on to the idea that from somewhere in the wings of all this drama waits a Margaret Mitchell, tortured but seeking redemption, and a Martin Luther King Jr. waiting for his cue. ■

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ERIC ALTERMAN

Fantasy Island

Washington Post writer Paul Farhi cleverly compared the content and structure of George W. Bush's second inaugural address to The Rascals' classic ditty "People Got to Be Free." It worked, but a better title for the speech might have been borrowed from Green Day's current smash, "American Idiot." The gap between the world's "reality based" community and the fantasy being sold us by our benighted leadership, with the help of a quiescent Fourth Estate, may never have been wider.

The word "freedom" passed Bush's lips twenty-seven times and "liberty" fifteen. Mentions of "Iraq," "Afghanistan," "Al Qaeda," "Iran," "Pakistan," "Chechnya," "Uzbekistan," Egypt," "Guantánamo," "Patriot Act," "Abu Ghraib," "torture," "suspension of habeas corpus" and "José Padilla" combined for a grand total of zero. Not a word either about the fact that Bush's messianic foreign policy is killing thousands of innocent Iraqis and American soldiers; sowing hatred of America across the Arab (and most of the non-Arab) world; recruiting terrorists for Al Qaeda–like organizations; torturing hundreds, perhaps thousands of victims in numerous nations; supporting and empowering tyranny around the world; destroying the liberty of American citizens and noncitizens alike here at home; and shredding time-honored constitutional liberties as it invents new federal police powers out of whole cloth.

None of these kakistocratic exercises would be possible if the media took seriously their constitutional charge to act as a check on the irresponsible exercise of power. To be fair, reporters at the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*—though not, it must be added, New York's Paper of Record—addressed the enormous disjuncture between Bush's lofty words and the Machiavellian machinations that underlie his policies, in articles titled, respectively, "Bush's Words on Liberty Don't Mesh With Policies," and "Putting Democracy First May Test Key Relationships." *Post* reporters Glenn Kessler and Robin Wright quoted experts and opposition figures to demonstrate how Bush's rhetoric "is at odds with the administration's increasingly close relations with repressive governments in every corner of the world." And in the *Los Angeles Times*, Doyle McManus noted that two days before the President's speech, Secretary of State–designate Condoleezza Rice proclaimed, "We embrace Pakistan as a vital ally in the war on terror"—a country, the article observed, led by a general who seized power in 1999 and last year broke his promise to step down from his position as chief of the armed forces. McManus also pointed out that Rice gave an explicit pass to Uzbekistan, a nation condemned by the State Department for its tyrannical suppression of most forms of freedom of expression.

Of course, these polite interventions understated the case. As Bush spoke to the frozen crowd of dignitaries and big-money donors, *The New Yorker* carried Seymour Hersh's latest investigations into the cold, dark heart of Bushism, including this quote from a former high-level intelligence official: "Do you remember the right-wing execution squads in El Salvador? We founded them and we financed them. The objective now is to recruit locals in any area we want. And we aren't going to tell Congress about it." There you have it. Bush, like Reagan before him, invokes America's highest ideals on behalf of a policy that supports mass murder and terrorism. Even when the reality of this gruesome charade is revealed, mainstream debate ignores it, preferring to focus on the phony expressions of "freedom" and "liberty" in front of the curtain. (If a liberal had made this accusation during the 1980s, when the US-supported death squads were doing their murderous dirty work, he would immediately have been tarred as pro-communist, or worse, by Reagan-friendly "liberal" publications like *The New Republic*.)

But even carefully worded examinations of the speech's most glaring contradictions had no place in America's *Pravda*-like cable news chat programs. As Media Matters for America documented, on CNN, MSNBC and FOX News "Republican and conservative guests and commentators outnumbered Democrats and progressives" forty-two to ten on the three networks. "Moreover, the rare Democrat or progressive guest usually appeared opposite conservatives, whereas most Republican and conservative guests and commentators appeared solo or alongside fellow conservatives." The ratio on CNN was ten to one, with extremist propaganda alternating with idiotic banter, such as Wolf Blitzer and Jeff Greenfield ruminating on the President's good fortune in being able to enjoy "a pretty cool license plate," "the best parking spaces in America and the coolest private plane."

To me, the most revealing commentary on the inauguration was provided by *The Weekly Standard*'s Fred Barnes. Writing in the organ that has provided the ideological window-dressing for so much of the Administration's adventurism, Barnes explained that the President's address had triumphantly ended the centuries-long ideological conflict between foreign policy idealists (meaning Woodrow Wilson and Ronald Reagan) and realists (George Kennan and Hans Morgenthau). "Boom!" wrote Barnes, "The wall between the two schools is gone, at least in the president's formulation." As he explained, "The policy of idealists will lead to the goal of realists," because Bush had declared that "America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one."

You have to be executive editor of *The Weekly Standard* to believe something that stupid. Indeed, the next day found numerous Administration members, speaking under the cover of Karl Rove–like background briefings, telling reporters not to pay too much attention to the man in front of the curtain. "White House officials said yesterday that President Bush's soaring inaugural address, in which he declared the goal of ending tyranny around the world, represents no significant shift in U.S. foreign policy," reported the *Post*'s Dan Balz and Jim VandeHei. Forty million dollars spent on parties, pomp and circumstance, and the next day, back to the same bullshit.

Is this a great country or what? ■

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ARTICLES

DICK DURBIN: BUSH FIGHTER

by JOHN NICHOLS

When Texas Supreme Court Justice Priscilla Owen, perhaps George Bush's most corporately compromised judicial nominee, appeared early in 2003 before the Senate Judiciary Committee, the most devastating line of questioning she faced did not come from one of the big-name inquisitors on a committee that includes a Kennedy, a Biden and a Leahy. Rather, Owen was taken down by a mild-mannered Midwesterner with a flair for discovering and exploiting the weaknesses of the Bush Administration and its judicial nominees. Could Owen identify any opinion she had ever written, Illinois Senator Dick Durbin inquired, "that was politically unpopular with the established power structure in Texas?" As Owen first asked Durbin to explain what he meant by "established power structure," and then stumbled through a non-answer that ended with her grumbling about political correctness, you could hear the wheels falling off the bandwagon the Administration had tried to create to win approval for their nominee. Even conservative Democratic senators recognized that they were dealing with a conservative judicial activist whose elevation to the US Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit would pose a genuine threat to justice in the Deep South, and joined a filibuster that ultimately led to the withdrawal of Owen's nomination.

How did Durbin know that Owen could not answer even the most basic questions about her subservience to political and economic special interests? Because, to a greater extent than any other senator, he has taken seriously the fight against Bush's most troubling judicial picks: carefully targeting the worst of them, mastering their records and developing lines of questioning meant to illustrate to other Democrats the necessity of rejecting them. "He doesn't just try to score points," says Nan Aron, president of the Alliance for Justice, the coalition of progressive groups that has been at the forefront of challenges to the Administration's strategy for reshaping the nation's courts. "He zeroes in on the issues that matter most and then he just starts demanding answers."

For the most part, Durbin's filleting of Bush's judicial nominees has been an obscure pleasure enjoyed mainly by Washington liberal activists who monitor the progress of judicial nominations. But that's about to change. When the 109th Congress begins to address the Bush agenda in coming days, Durbin—an unassuming, 60-year-old everyman with a self-deprecating sense of humor, a willingness to share the spotlight and a penchant for skipping Washington parties to return to his hometown of Springfield—is quickly emerging as the most aggressive and progressive member of the Senate Democratic leadership. Durbin has challenged the Bush Administration on everything from judicial nominations to flu vaccine to torture at Abu Ghraib. He has hit the ground running with votes against Attorney General nominee Alberto Gonzales and Secretary of State nominee Condoleezza Rice. And there is every indication that he intends to show Congressional Democrats how to be something they have not been since Bush assumed the presidency: an effective opposition.

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Those who have followed Durbin's twenty-two-year career as a member of the House and Senate argue with confidence that his election as Senate Democratic whip, the second-highest-ranking position in the caucus, was one of the few bright spots in the dark days following the 2004 election debacle. "If you believe in progressive politics, you have to be excited that Durbin's where he is," says David Axelrod, a veteran Democratic consultant who has run a number of Senate races and last year managed John Edwards's presidential campaign.

The November 2 defeat of minority leader Tom Daschle opened the way for a long-needed reshuffling of the Democratic Party's leadership in the upper chamber. Yet the move of Daschle's lieutenant, Nevadan Harry Reid, into the minority leader position inspired little excitement; Reid is scrappier than Daschle, but his centrist tendencies, particularly on hot-button issues such as reproductive rights and gun control, have always marked him more as a manager than a marauder. The rise of Durbin holds out the prospect of the something extra that Democrats have been missing: an edgy willingness to battle the powers that be, not just in the Senate but in the court of public opinion. "It's not an accident that Durbin is the whip. I don't think he's been elevated to be a mute," adds Axelrod, who has known the Illinois Senator since the late 1970s. "Harry Reid is a more reticent player. Because Reid is who he is, it was incumbent on the party to have an advocate in leadership, and that's Dick."

'We have to stand up, look at our own agenda, our own language and figure out how we build this back into a majority party.'

Durbin is not, however, a maverick. Though he has one of the most liberal voting records in the Senate, he sees himself as very much in the mainstream of his party. But he recognizes something that too many party leaders in both houses have had a hard time wrapping their heads around since the 1994 election handed power to the Republicans: The mainstream of his party is not currently the mainstream of Congress. Democrats must therefore stop thinking of themselves as the natural party of government and start operating as an opposition force—picking the right fights, remaining united in their dissents and establishing a record on the most critical issues of the day that is distinct from that of the White House and the House and Senate majorities. "We have to have our own agenda," says Durbin, who has already begun meeting with Reid and House minority leader Nancy Pelosi to shape a clearer Democratic line. Yes, Democrats suffered a serious setback in the 2004 elections—they now hold just forty-four seats in the Senate (Independent Jim Jeffords caucuses with the group to create a 55–45 partisan split). But Durbin does not see his party's diminished position as an excuse for a compromise of ideals; in fact, he says, "we Democrats can't take this sitting down. We have to stand up, look at our own agenda, our own language and figure out how we build this back into a majority party."

Durbin is ready for that fight. The new whip is a man of government, so much so that he once served as the parliamentarian for Democrats in the Illinois legislature. Since arriving in Washington in 1983 as a young congressman representing the district that once sent Abraham Lincoln to the House, Durbin has mastered the protocols of Capitol Hill. But he also knows how to trump the Republicans in the battle of public opinion. Last fall, before the extent of the nationwide flu vaccine shortage was fully revealed to the American people, Senate majority leader Bill Frist sent a letter to senators urging them to get inoculated. Durbin responded with a show of populist fury that would have well served Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry, who never quite figured out how to capitalize on a public health crisis that had occurred on his opponent's watch. "It simply isn't fair for senators to cut to the front of the line when seniors around the country have been forced to wait for hours to get a flu shot," raged Durbin, who turned down the proffered shot and then dispatched a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson demanding to know "whether or not officials in our government knew that problems were coming and did little or nothing to prevent them."

Durbin learned how to play to win in one of the nation's most savage political settings. Born and raised in southern Illinois by parents who were active trade unionists, he has spent a lifetime in the rough-and-tumble world of Illinois Democratic politics, where generations of idealists were ground up by the Daley family's Chicago machine. But Durbin attached himself early on to two idealists who proved to be tougher than the machine: liberal icon Paul Douglas, and the man who would eventually occupy Douglas's seat in the Senate, Paul Simon, the bow-tied battler for civil rights and civil liberties. Durbin describes the late Simon as "my closest friend in political life."

"If you want to know where Dick Durbin is coming from, you have to understand his connections to Paul Douglas and Paul Simon, which I think taught him that you don't need to put your finger in the wind every time an issue comes up," says Dawn Clark Netsch, a former Illinois legislator and gubernatorial candidate. "Dick learned that you can have good political instincts and still have principles. In fact, he learned that you have to have good political instincts if you're going to stand on principle and win."

More than anyone else, Simon paved the way for Durbin in politics, ultimately tapping his former aide to inherit Simon's Senate seat in 1996. Simon knew Durbin was ready. During his previous seven terms in the US House, Durbin had led fights to scrap funding for the Strategic Defense Initiative, to defend funding for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program and to ban smoking on planes (Durbin, who was 14 when his father died of lung cancer, has fought what *Congressional Quarterly* describes as a "relentless campaign against the tobacco industry"). Durbin was not always a perfect progressive. Though he now gets 100 percent ratings from Planned Parenthood and NARAL Pro-Choice America, he started in politics as a foe of abortion rights. And his first House race, in 1982, benefited from a dramatic infusion of pro-Israel money that helped him depose former Republican Representative Paul Findley, a thoughtful critic of Israeli policies who wanted the United States to develop better relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization. There was a time when liberals in Illinois and beyond saw Durbin as someone who played the game of

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politics a little too well. But, says Arab American Institute president Jim Zogby, Durbin's record in Congress has won over doubters. "For my part, I've always looked at Durbin as a progressive Democrat, but he has really emerged in that regard in recent years," says Zogby. "In particular, his commitment to civil liberties has been extraordinary."

Though Durbin cast an unwise vote for the USA Patriot Act in the fall of 2001, he soon emerged as one of the Senate's most outspoken critics of that legislation's excesses. Zogby says that Durbin stands out as one of Congress's most ardent battlers against racial and ethnic profiling, a stance for which he has earned high praise from the American Civil Liberties Union. And as the Abu Ghraib scandal blew up, it was Durbin who introduced an amendment to the 2005 defense authorization bill reaffirming the US ban on torture. More recently, during the Judiciary Committee confirmation hearings on the nomination of Alberto Gonzales to serve as Attorney General, Durbin grilled the White House counsel regarding the Administration's tolerance of torture before voting against him.

'I think [the vote against the Iraq War] was the most important vote that I ever cast... and I think it was one of the best votes.'

In recent years, Durbin has become the go-to man for liberal activists who cannot get a hearing from their own senators. When Bush nominated Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Diane Sykes, a rigid conservative with a troubling record on criminal justice issues, to serve on the US Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, Wisconsin's Democratic senators deferred to home-state pressures and backed away from a fight. But Durbin took it on, charging that Sykes had engaged in "major-league evasion" when she was asked by Judiciary Committee members about abortion rights issues, and he convinced more than two dozen Democratic senators to join him in opposing a nominee who many believe is on the fast track to become the next conservative woman on the US Supreme Court. "Most senators, particularly senators who are angling for a place in the leadership, would not take on a fight like that," says the Alliance for Justice's Aron. "But Durbin recognized that there was a need to challenge her at this point, if only to establish a record for the future."

While Durbin is very much a member of the inner circle of Senate progressives—after the 2002 elections he formed a loose-knit progressive caucus that included Massachusetts's Ted Kennedy, Wisconsin's Russ Feingold, New Jersey's Jon Corzine and several other senators who wanted Democrats to get more aggressive in battling Bush—he is no fan of lonely protest votes. He is determined to hold the Democratic caucus together in order to get the forty votes necessary to stall Bush nominees and policies. Even as he moves to leadership, Durbin plans to maintain a high profile on the Judiciary Committee—and to serve as a bridge between committee Democrats and the full caucus. "I think the members of our caucus understand the gravity of this moment," he says. "The new Supreme Court Justice could tip the scales on many close decisions. I hope President Bush really does the right thing for America and finds someone who is more moderate and not extreme. But if he should choose someone who is extreme in his positions, then I think that the Senate Democratic caucus will stand together and oppose him."

Durbin can also be expected to lead on issues related to the war in Iraq. Both Daschle and Reid voted in favor of authorizing President Bush to use force against Iraq in the fall of 2002. Durbin, on the other hand, was one of the Senate's loudest critics of the measure. "I felt then as a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee that the President had not made his case for that war, and certainly had not demonstrated that we were prepared to go in effectively and win quickly," he says. "Without a broad coalition, without the support of other nations, we ran the risk of what we're currently facing, which is an intractable conflict with no end in sight." Does that mean that Durbin is ready to begin talking about the need for a timeline for the withdrawal of US troops? "I don't know that we've reached that moment, but we may be near," he says. Then, showing those political instincts that have served him so well, Durbin frames his questioning of the war in terms of concern for Army National Guard and Reserve units that he says have been "pushed to the breaking point." He says, "The President is facing a strain on the military that cannot be sustained."

Durbin's vote against the Iraq War came during his first Senate re-election campaign, and he took hits from his Republican challenger for casting it, but he was easily re-elected. "Durbin crossed the Rubicon with that 2002 vote against the war," says David Axelrod, the political consultant. "He made it clear that, even as he was moving up in the Senate, he wasn't going to start looking over his shoulder and worrying about what votes were safe." For his part, Durbin says, "I think it was the most important vote that I ever cast in twenty-two years of service on Capitol Hill, and I think it was one of the best votes." Then, sounding like a very different leader than Senate Democrats have had for a long time, he adds, "I am not going to shrink away from this at all. In fact, I think the American people are ready for Democrats to start speaking up."

Durbin's determination to speak out, and his proven ability to do so in ways that work, both on Capitol Hill and beyond, do not merely mark him as a man to watch in this Congress. They mark him as one of the best hopes for a party that has struggled for the better part of a decade to identify itself as something more than just the lite brand of Republicanism. The man who was on the vice-presidential short lists of Al Gore in 2000 and John Kerry in 2004 dismisses talk of a presidential run; he jokes that he now leaves such speculation to the junior senator from Illinois, his friend and ideological ally Barack Obama. What he really wants, Durbin says, is to stop playing defense and to use what he refers to as "the most important forum in America" to define the Democratic Party as a vibrant alternative to the conservative brainlock that has settled over Washington. "This is a critical moment for our party, but it is also a critical moment for our nation. Right now, we have to fight to prevent bad things from happening, but that's not enough," says Durbin. "We need to be blunt about what distinguishes Democrats from Republicans on the issues that matter. You can do that as an opposition party. And if you do it right, you won't be the opposition party for long." ■

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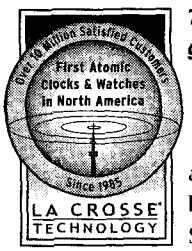

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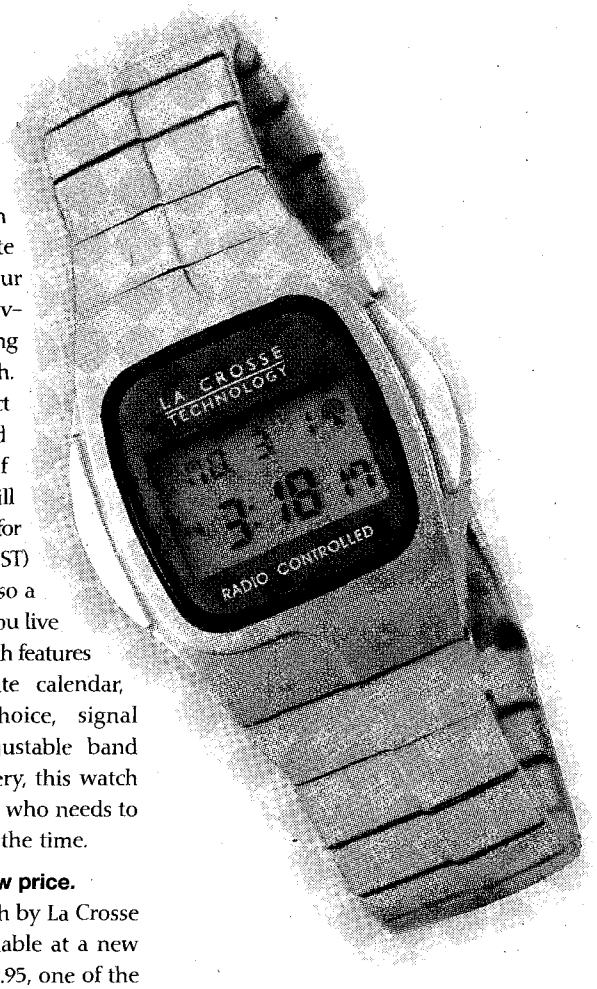

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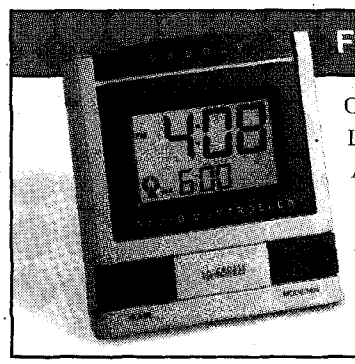

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HIS HEADLINE-GRABBING INVESTIGATIONS ARE ENOUGH TO GIVE THE GOP HEARTBURN.

Waxman: Democrats' Eliot Ness

DAVID CORN

RYAN INZANA

It's nothing new, says Representative Henry Waxman. For decades—literally—this Democrat from the Westside of Los Angeles has mounted high-profile investigations and hearings while churning out sharp-edged reports: on toxic emissions, the tobacco industry, pesticides in drinking water. But during George W. Bush's first term as President, Waxman, the senior Democrat on the Government Reform Committee, established himself as the Democrats' chief pursuer of purported wrongdoing within the Bush Administration. He has mounted a series of "special investigations"—of Halliburton, Enron, the flu vaccine crisis, conflicts of interest at the Department of Homeland Security, national missile defense. He has produced reports on secrecy in the Bush Administration, misleading prewar assertions made by Bush officials about Iraq's WMDs, Bush's politicization of science. And he has won considerable media attention for his efforts. Working with Representative John Dingell, he sicced the Government Accountability Office on Vice President Dick Cheney's energy task force to get the names of the industry executives who helped cook up Cheney's energy plan. (Cheney told the GAO to take a hike; the GAO filed suit, lost and then declined to appeal.) More recently, Waxman released a headlines-grabbing report revealing that federally funded abstinence-only sex-ed programs peddle false information to teens. (One claimed condom use does not prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.) With all this muckraking, the 65-year-old Waxman has become the Eliot Ness of the Democrats.

"Waxman has been important for House Democrats," says Representative Jim McGovern, a liberal from Massachusetts. "With the Republicans controlling the White House and Congress, it's hard to be heard. He's found ways to get our message out." Representative George Miller, the senior Democrat on the Education Committee, notes, "He's developed the model. It's what we would like every ranking member to do—to ask questions, be persistent and not accept silence. He's motivated other Democrats and has even created some discontent within the Democratic caucus because newer members on other committees sometimes don't think the ranking members are aggressive enough." And on the Senate side, Democrats—perhaps encouraged by Waxman's example—have announced they will create their own investigative team and conduct unofficial hearings on alleged Bush Administration wrongdoing.

The snub-nosed, bespectacled, balding and far-from-tall Waxman is not flamboyant or flashy. He speaks softly but directly and has a forceful manner. His Democratic colleagues routinely joke about his persistence and tenacity. "Don't get into an argument with Henry," says Miller. "But if you do, bring your lunch. He won't let you go."

Waxman grew up in an apartment over a Watts grocery store run by his father, the son of Russian immigrants. In 1968, at the age of 28, Waxman, a leader of Young Democrats, defeated an incumbent Democratic assemblyman. Six years later he was elected to the House from a new district that included West Hollywood, Beverly Hills and Santa Monica. His is one of the most wealthy, most Democratic and most liberal districts in the nation. Waxman, appropriately enough, is a stalwart liberal (and an ardent Israel supporter), but he is glitz-free. He has never attended the Oscars. He and his wife, Janet, keep kosher.

It's not as if Waxman set out specifically to establish an anti-Bush task force after the 2000 election. "Doing reports, conducting oversight—it's what he has always done," says Phil Schiliro, who has worked for Waxman since 1982 (with the exception of one year). Through most of Waxman's first twenty years in Congress, he chaired the influential Health and Environment Subcommittee and mainly focused on legislation—Medicaid expansion, the clean-air law, AIDS, tobacco—winning a description in *The Almanac of American Politics* as "a skilled and idealistic policy entrepreneur." During those years, Waxman says, producing reports was primarily a device for drawing attention to an issue and building a case for legislation. For instance, after the 1984 disaster at a Union Carbide chemical plant in Bhopal, India, he and his staff, realizing that toxic air pollutants were unregulated in the United States, investigated the pollution from chemical plants in Kanawha Valley, West Virginia. The resulting report concluded that the valley was being exposed to high amounts of toxic emissions. With that report in hand, Waxman pushed through legislation that required the Environmental Protection Agency to collect more data on emissions. He then used the information gathered to win passage in 1990 of a measure that reduced toxic air pollution.

When Republicans booted the Democrats out of the majority in 1994, Waxman lost control of the subcommittee and his investigative staff. But he soon had another. In 1997 he became the ranking Democrat on the Government Reform Committee, which, as Waxman notes, has "oversight and investigative jurisdiction over everything." (Technically, the committee is supposed to ascertain that the federal government is functioning well.) At the time, the committee was primarily engaged in anti-Clinton investigations launched by then-chairman Dan Burton. The House leadership, eager to see Burton chasing after the Clintons on the Whitewater and campaign finance scandals, gladly said yes to Burton's request for more staff. Under House rules, Waxman was entitled to a third of the resources for his minority staff. This allowed him to build a team of Democratic investigators.

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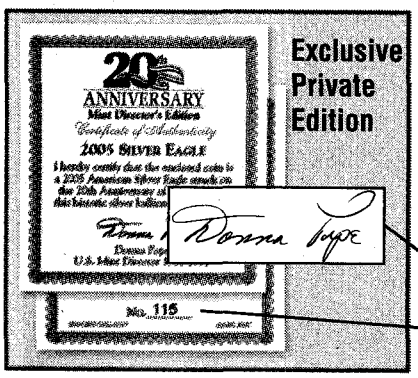

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Initially Waxman's minority staff mostly contended with Burton's pursuit of Clinton wrongdoing (real and imagined). But in the Bush years—with the Republican majority of the committee not so keen on oversight aimed at the current Administration—Waxman's investigators have had more opportunity to set their own course. Waxman cannot hold official hearings or issue subpoenas, but he is able to request information (even if frequently the Administration tells him to get lost). Moreover, the committee has what's called the "seven-member rule," under which executive agencies have to comply with an information request from seven of the committee's members. Since there are twenty Democrats on the committee, Waxman would have little trouble enlisting enough supporters for almost any request, but he has been hesitant to invoke this law often. When he has—to obtain census data and suppressed cost estimates of the Medicare prescription drug legislation—the Bush Administration has refused to cooperate, forcing Waxman to file lawsuits. The main case involving the seven-member rule is still before a federal court.

But Waxman has not needed this rule to conduct inquiries and win headlines. For example, after the State Department released an annual terrorism report last year declaring that international terrorism was on the decline, Waxman's staff, picking up on news accounts showing the report was inaccurate, questioned the State Department about the production of the document. Waxman then pressed the department to provide the full data. A month later, it released a revised version reporting that significant terrorism acts were actually at a twenty-year high. In other instances, his investigators do original work. They made front-page news with the sexual-abstinence report. In September Waxman joined with several Democratic senators to hold unofficial hearings on contracting in Iraq, during which witnesses disclosed new allegations of Halliburton abuses.

His anti-Bush efforts—and those of all Democrats—did fall short on election day. But Waxman points to some small victories: exposing political manipulation of a Health and Human Services report on ethnic and racial disparities in healthcare, and pressuring the Pentagon to kill a fuel contract with Halliburton. Last year *Scientific American* noted that "until recently, many scientists who complained [about Bush's politicization of science] in private held their tongues in public. Waxman has given scientists' fears a voice, and a growing crowd of scientific organizations, advocacy groups and former officials are adding to the chorus." Waxman's staff has also produced reports tailored for the districts of his Democratic colleagues. One study assembled information on the high cost of prescription drugs in specific districts, enabling Democratic members from these areas to use the reports to garner media attention at home. That's one reason Waxman is generally popular among House Democrats. He is also appreciated by his colleagues for being a prolific fundraiser who supports other Democrats. And his ambitions do not threaten fellow House members. "One of his luxuries," says Schiliro, "is that he doesn't want to run for anything else. That's enormously liberating."

Working with other Democrats, Waxman notes, has not always been easy. Through the 1980s, he engaged in a now-legendary clash with John Dingell, then the powerful chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee and a protector of the auto industry, over clean-air legislation. Finally, the two hammered out a deal that led to the 1990 Clean Air Act. In 2003 Waxman proposed setting up an independent commission to investigate Bush's use—or abuse—of the intelligence on WMDs in Iraq. But senior Democrats who deal with intelligence issues would not join him. "More and more," he says, "I am happy to do things on my own."

Waxman has been characterized by the right-wing media as a partisan hack only interested in nipping at Bush's heels. But with no opportunity to legislate, there's little alternative for him but to focus on oversight. And Waxman has not always acted as a partisan pitbull. In the mid-1990s he spent two years privately concocting a tobacco bill with Republican Representative Thomas Bliley, a champion of the tobacco industry. The two reached a compromise, Waxman says, but the GOP House leadership rejected the measure. During the Clinton campaign finance scandal, Waxman called for Attorney General Janet Reno to appoint a special counsel. "We were not happy with that," says one former Clinton White House aide. Later Waxman assailed Clinton for pardoning fugitive financier Marc Rich.

Waxman did vote to grant Bush the authority to invade Iraq. He now says, "If I knew then what I know now, I wouldn't have voted for it." He points out that two days before the invasion he sent a letter to Bush noting that Bush's use of the unproven allegation that Iraq had sought uranium in Africa was an act of "knowing deception or unfathomable incompetence" that undermined Bush's case for war. Waxman was on to the Niger story months before it became big news, but his charge that Bush had peddled misinformation—or disinformation—received little notice in the United States.

Waxman has a safe seat; he handily wins re-election. His anti-Bush endeavors play well in Hollywood. Without having to fret about re-election, he can afford to exercise what Schiliro cites as one of his chief assets: patience. "He doesn't mind spending eight years working on an issue," Schiliro says. "He passed AIDS and clean-air legislation, and that took years." And that may be why, when I ask Waxman if he will be able to remain motivated for another four years of Bush battles, he simply shrugs his shoulders. With four more Bush years to come, Waxman says, he expects to stay the course: more investigations, more reports. On what he's not sure, but he does say he anticipates continuing his probes of government contracting. "I hope we can investigate this with the Republicans," he comments. "This isn't partisan; it involves protecting taxpayer dollars. And there's been a clear failure of oversight by the Republicans. If they won't join us, then we'll just have to get the information out to the public." But, he adds, "it's hard for the Democrats to be as mean and tough as the House Republican leadership."

While lamenting the decline of Congressional oversight and pondering the work to be done in Bush's second term, Waxman recalls a recent meeting he had with a member of the Israeli Knesset. The legislator had mentioned he was in charge of the committee that handles oversight. But how could this be, Waxman asked him, since he was in the opposition? The Israeli explained that in Israel the committee that oversees the national government is traditionally chaired by a member of the opposition. After recounting this conversation, Waxman pauses for a moment, then wistfully says, "It's an interesting idea." ■

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HISTORY HOLDS CLUES TO A WINNING ELECTORAL STRATEGY FOR PROGRESSIVES.

Visualizing a Neo-Rainbow

DANNY GLOVER AND BILL FLETCHER JR.

In 2004 the winner-take-all system of US electoral politics again proved an obstacle to genuine democracy. While progressives found little to get excited about in the John Kerry campaign, there were no viable third-party candidates, leaving them without a fully satisfying choice at the ballot box, even if most of us ended up voting for Kerry as a statement against Bush. More important, there was no candidate whose campaign offered progressives the opportunity to develop a real political/electoral base that could move us closer to building power and influence.

RYAN INZANA

The most recent campaign that held that kind of promise was the Rainbow insurgency of the 1980s, including the 1984 and '88 presidential campaigns of the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, and the building of the National Rainbow Coalition.

The Rainbow movement and candidacies have much to teach us today. While the Rev. Jesse Jackson was a charismatic leader, the Rainbow Coalition movement and the Jackson presidential campaigns were about far more than Jesse Jackson. The approach that Jackson advanced—building an organization and campaign both inside and outside the Democratic Party—points progressives in the direction we should be moving now.

The political emergence of Jackson took place within the context of a larger, black-led electoral upsurge that witnessed campaigns such as the successful Harold Washington run for mayor of Chicago and the unsuccessful but no less inspiring Mel King campaign for mayor of Boston. Those campaigns were not only a reaction to the early years of the Reagan/Bush Administration and its economic attacks on working people and veiled attacks on people of color but an outgrowth of the movement for black political power that emerged in response to the unfulfilled promise of the civil rights victories two decades earlier.

Jackson seized the moment to speak nationally on behalf of these movements, but he did something even more important than that. He articulated a political vision that, while based on the African-American experience, did not represent solely a "black candidacy" or "black politics." Jackson tapped into a growing anger and frustration arising on the US political scene among both historically and newly disenfranchised populations. He spoke to issues of economic injustice without abandoning the question of race, thus avoiding the classic error of white populists who attempt to build unity by addressing economic issues only. Jackson linked these issues. His appearances before white farmers and workers brought forth a response that previously had been unimaginable.

Jackson tapped into three key constituencies in order to build and anchor both the Rainbow and his 1984 and '88 candidacies: the African-American political establishment, African-American religious institutions (including both Muslim and Christian denominations) and the left. These constituencies had differing, though often overlapping, agendas, which inevitably led to both vibrancy and tensions within the movement. No one expected Jackson to receive the Democratic Party nomination, let alone win the presidency, but the power of the movement and the potential for something longer-lasting signaled the importance of this initiative [for a full discussion of the Rainbow Coalition and candidacies, see JoAnn Wypijewski, "The Rainbow's Gravity," August 2/9, 2004].

Of course, it's also important to remember how the movement unraveled after the fateful gathering of the Rainbow Coalition's executive board in March 1989, largely because of Jackson's move to turn the coalition—the core of his movement—into a personal political operation. There is a lesson in this, too: Progressives should beware the charismatic leader who defines movement loyalty as personal loyalty to him- or herself rather than to the movement and its objectives.

After the Rainbow

In the wake of what we would describe as Jackson's coup against himself, alternative views and strategies toward progressive electoral and mass initiatives began to surface. For example, former Texas agricultural commissioner Jim Hightower proposed a "Democratic-Populist Alliance" to fill the void left by the collapse of the Jackson Rainbow; the late trade union leader Tony Mazzocchi founded the Labor Party; through the New Party, Dan Cantor and Joel Rogers advocated a fusion approach to politics—later undermined by a Supreme Court decision in 1997—whereby independent parties could achieve power by cross-endorsing major-party candidates; former National Rainbow Coalition executive director Ron Daniels campaigned as an independent for the presidency in 1992; and the Green Party emerged at the local level, mounting successful runs for municipal and county positions on a progressive platform.

These initiatives, however worthy, had some problems in common. None of them fully grasped the political moment, which was characterized by the impact of the civil rights movement, the resistance to Reaganism and the black-led electoral upsurge. With the exception of Daniels, they did not understand the importance of race and the political movements of people of color, and for the

Danny Glover is a longtime human rights activist and internationally recognized actor. Bill Fletcher Jr. is a longtime labor and international activist and was deeply involved in the 1984 and 1988 Jackson presidential campaigns. The views expressed are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily express the outlooks or positions of organizations with which they are associated.

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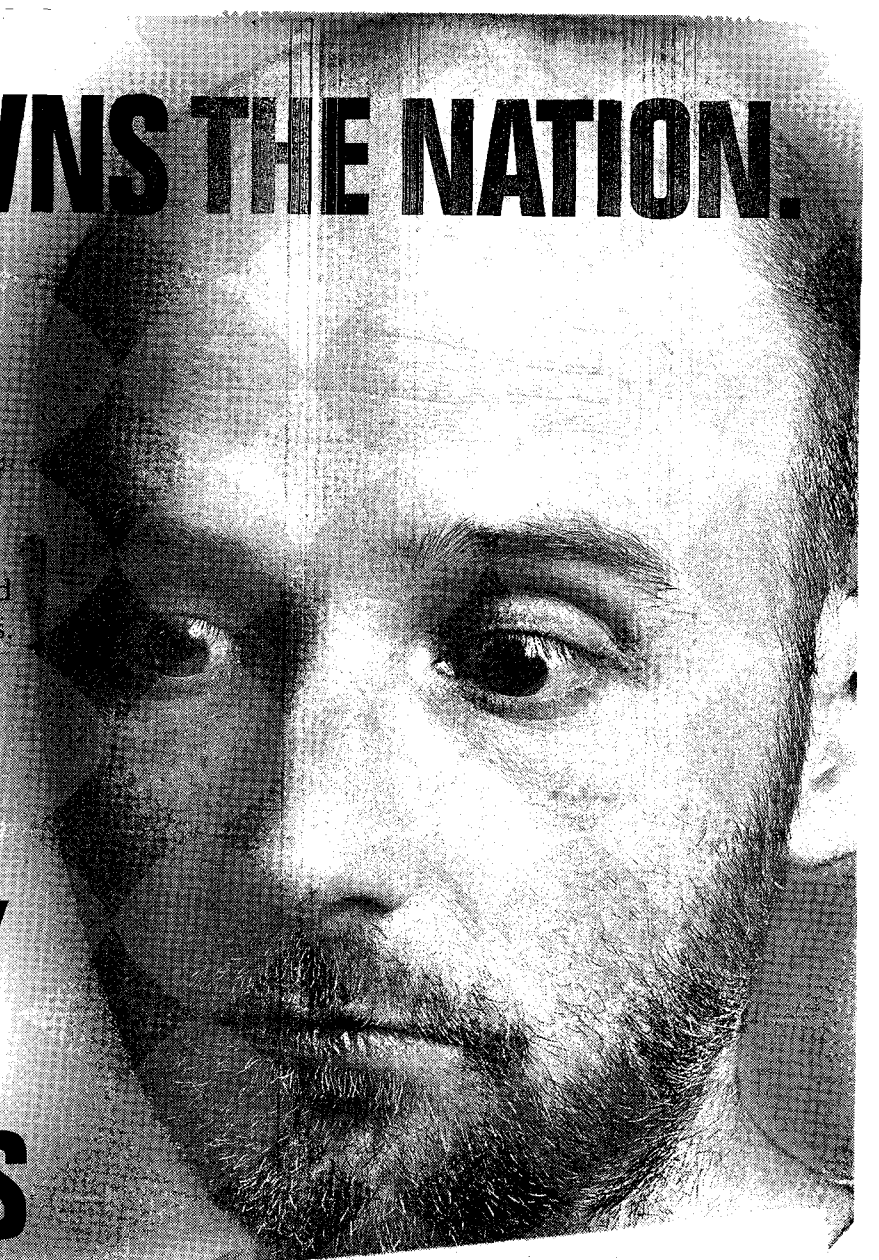

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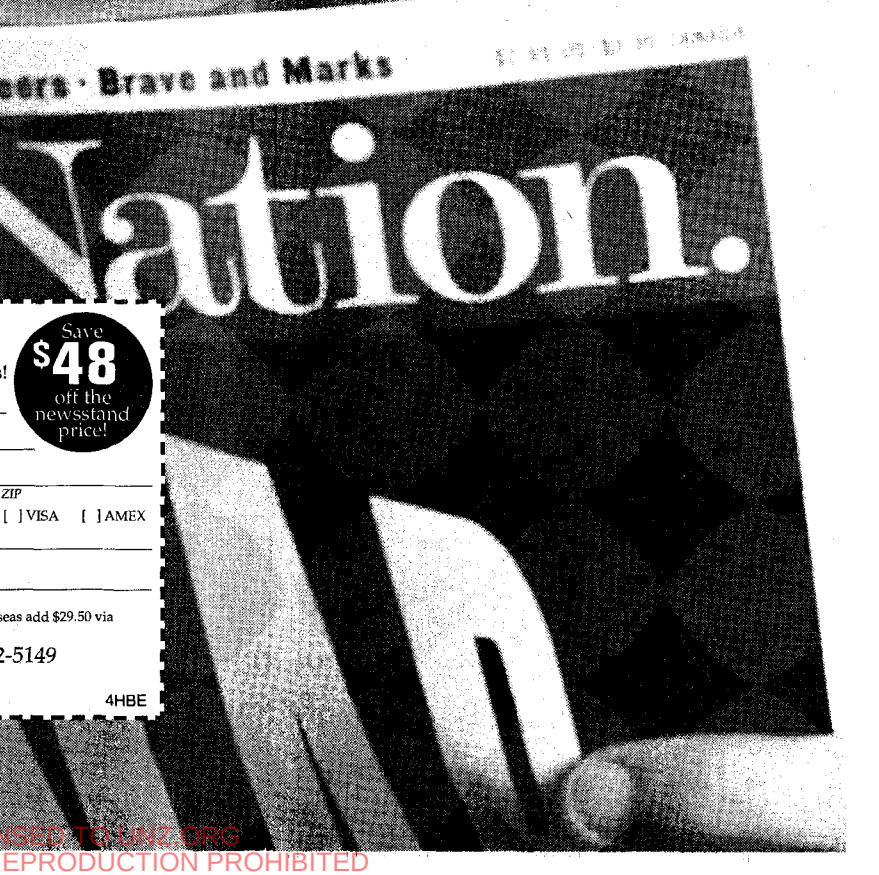

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most part they lacked a base among communities of color, thus denying them the moral authority Jackson and the Rainbow possessed to challenge collective injustice in US society. As a result, they weren't able to build a united-front approach to politics.

Moreover, the post-Rainbow initiatives generally did not recognize and embrace a central strategic conception of Jackson's: that success depends on wielding power both within the Democratic Party and outside it. The Rainbow as an independent effort was deeply unsettling to the Democratic Party establishment (hence its successful effort to discourage Jackson from running as an independent for the Senate in South Carolina in 1984). At the same time, working inside the Democratic Party troubles many people on the left, who have a quite justified skepticism, if not antipathy, to the politics and practice of Democratic Party officialdom. Nonetheless, it is this central strategic—"inside/outside"—conception that must be revived and must serve as a basis for the next round of progressive electoral politics.

A Neo-Rainbow Approach to Politics

The failure of most post-Rainbow electoral initiatives has led progressives to do one of several things: (1) throw up their hands and accept the terms of operation within the Democratic Party; (2) throw up their hands and accept electoral marginalization through symbolic electoral interventions, or else third-party races at the local level that have yet to move national politics in a progressive direction; (3) throw up their hands and abandon electoral politics in favor of "pure" social action movements; or (4) just throw up.

Each of these tendencies reflects a degree of despair about the possibilities of progressive political practice in the electoral arena. Constructing such a practice is key to overcoming this despair and to the creation of a sustained movement for substantive, even transformative, politics in the United States. Despite the high degree of abstention in the electoral arena, there is a deep belief that the system should work, even if it does not. The immediate challenge is to develop a progressive majoritarian bloc within the context of the existing political system.

Taking up this strategic challenge means coming face to face with the problem of the Democratic Party. As much as many progressives may wish for the replacement of the party by a left/progressive party of struggle, this is unlikely to happen in the near term. Independent political parties have simply failed to ignite widespread populist electoral activity. At the same time, no one should expect that the Democratic Party will itself become the party of the dispossessed.

Instead, activists should look upon the Democratic Party as itself a field of struggle. Such a view flows from a realization of the undemocratic nature of the US electoral system and the dilemmas that creates. In this context, the fight must take place both within and without the Democratic Party. To carry out such a struggle necessitates organization, vision and strategy. It also needs the right core in order to anchor it in reality and build the united front that such an effort or insurgency must represent. We believe these to be the key parameters for an effective neo-Rainbow electoral strategy.

It should be obvious, though it is often not, that discussions about a neo-Rainbow electoral strategy are grounded in a desire to win political power. Many of us on the left and progressive side of the aisle are so accustomed to losing and existing under siege that the prospect of winning is not only beyond our belief system but often scary. Winning necessitates political alignments, compromises and often tactics that are far from pure.

As we build this struggle, there are some pitfalls to avoid, such as yoking it to a particular candidacy, which contributed to the Rainbow's collapse. Congressman Dennis Kucinich's failed bid for the Democratic nomination in 2004 suffered from the same problem. Lacking a powerful and diverse core outside the candidate, Kucinich's campaign did not become the vehicle for organization and political action it might have been, particularly in light of his courageous anti–Iraq War stand. Additionally, in shelving race in the name of economic justice, Kucinich ran into the same problems most white populists do. Thus, while an alternative electoral strategy will need strong candidates, it cannot depend on one particular personality for its foundation.

What the Neo-Rainbow Needs

A neo-Rainbow electoral strategy needs: (1) to build an identifiable, accountable organization that operates inside and outside the Democratic Party; (2) to have people of color in its core leadership, and a base among African-Americans and Latinos (not to the exclusion of others); (3) to have a united-front approach to growth, encompassing diverse constituencies; (4) to be pro-equality populist in its politics, embracing the struggles for racial, gender and economic justice as the cornerstones of democracy; (5) to support a change in US foreign policy toward what can be called a democratic foreign policy; (6) to root itself among working people and their issues, and develop a ground-up approach, involving ward and precinct organizations and a targeted effort to build political power in key strategic zones.

Let's consider each of these elements of a neo-Rainbow strategy in turn:

§ *Inside/outside.* Drawing on the history of the Rainbow candidacies and organization, as well as other efforts, such as the Non-Partisan Leagues of the early twentieth century, an inside/outside approach responds to the actual political constraints of the US electoral system. Contrary to criticisms often raised by the ultra-"left," the failure of the Rainbow movement lay not in following this strategy but in its inability to build a democratic organization that was sufficiently rooted in social movements and independent of one personality.

Working inside and outside the Democratic Party means establishing an organization—not an independent political party but an independent organization—that runs candidates in the Democratic primaries, runs in nonpartisan elections and runs independently, all based on an assessment of the actual situation rather than on a cookie-cutter format. Working inside and outside the Democratic Party does not mean placing a great deal of time and attention on occupying specific positions within the Democratic Party itself. Decisions about whether such tactics make sense need to be made with an eye to long-term political strategy.

§ *The core.* The Rainbow grew out of the black-led electoral upsurge of the early 1980s. It was rooted in a movement. In addition, the core was people of color who linked racial justice with broader social- and economic-justice issues. Likewise, for any

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effective neo-Rainbow effort, it is essential to have a core that not only represents the changing demographics of the United States but also comes to the table representing actual constituencies.

§ *A united front.* The approach toward activity and movement/organization building must be that of a united front. Jesse Jackson's willingness and ability to reach out to diverse constituencies was one of the most admirable aspects of the Rainbow movement of the 1980s. In addition, largely through the activities of the left, additional constituencies were tapped, constituencies with which Jackson had little history. Asians and Latinos, particularly, became integral to the campaigns and movement.

§ *Pro-equality populism.* The politics of a neo-Rainbow initiative must be pro-equality populist. This means having more than an anticorporate message, as important as that is. It must be about more than class, though rooted among working people and seeking the support of labor unions. A movement that links the fights for racial, gender and economic justice will resonate particularly, though not exclusively, with communities of color.

Pro-equality populist politics is fundamentally about inclusion. Jackson embodied this principle in the 1980s, for example in his open, public embrace of gays and lesbians at a point when many, if not most, traditional political leaders kept the gay community at arm's length. Twenty-first-century pro-equality populism must be just as courageous and as inclusive.

§ *A democratic foreign policy.* In light of the current international situation and the aggressive, maniacal US foreign policy—unchecked by the generally spineless official Democratic Party—a neo-Rainbow movement would need to articulate a compelling alternative vision of international affairs and foreign policy. This democratic foreign policy could be premised on multilateralism, mutual respect among nations, nonmilitary methods of problem solving, the self-determination of nations and opposition to US interventionism. While this is not a radical program, it would represent a significant reform in US foreign policy.

§ *A strategic, ground-up approach.* The neo-Rainbow project cannot be limited to a formal coalition that comes together around a specific candidate or set of candidates. Although there will need to be targeted geographic areas in which it will first take root, this must be a national project that articulates a compelling social vision aimed at breaking the isolation of left/progressive activists and movements, focusing them on strategies for achieving political power. At the same time, this project must be based in communities, through ward and precinct organization, bringing together committed activist leaders (leaders with a small "l") around the mission and vision of the project. Building the neo-Rainbow project, then, would entail analyzing the power structures in various communities, understanding the real issues of the people, linking with community- and workplace-based organizations, identifying potential candidates for office and the issues around which they should organize their campaigns, and, ultimately, running for office.

In the Rainbow movement of the 1980s, we caught a glimpse of what the new politics could be. It led some to believe that a political realignment could be brought into existence by the beginning of the twenty-first century. For a host of reasons, this did not come to pass. Yet we can draw upon that movement for far more than inspiration. We can see in the Rainbow the direction in which our journey must take us. While the road may look somewhat familiar, it will be a journey to the undiscovered country—a journey into the future. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

designed to lead to a breakdown of the country and its eventual division into three separate countries, Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish. The purpose is to enable the United States to more easily control the resources (water, oil and land) by pitting one faction against another (divide and conquer, yet again) thereby insuring that Iraq will never regain the power it had under Saddam Hussein (when despite his despotism Iraq was highly industrialized, had the highest literacy rates and the most emancipated women in the region and was a secular state) or the power it had as the only member of OPEC that sold its petrol not in dollars but in euros.

More important, this is the belief of many Iraqis and others (Egyptians, Jordanians, Syrians, etc.) now living and working in Iraq. Whether this is truly the US "plan" or not, many in Iraq believe it to be true. Some say this division of the country will occur quite quickly, within two years, and they have little power to stop it from happening. They are sure of it. This is an Arab perspective that has not been brought forward in the Western press.

NILE EL WARDANI

MORE MEMORIES OF JACK

Washington, DC

■ Re "Jack Newfield" [Jan. 10/17]: One of Jack's great contributions is the groundbreaking work he did to tell the real story about George Bush's judicial nominees. His stories broke the mold, combining his extensive experience and knowledge of politics and history with his passion for justice. Miss Manners would have been appalled at his style. Junior staff at Alliance for Justice answered his phone calls with fear and trepidation. He was crotchety, impatient and demanding. They learned, however, that over time it was every bit worth the sweat and tears. Jack defied conventional standards of reporting. By writing what others would never say, going the extra mile to interview critical sources, reading lengthy hearing transcripts, confronting combative senators, he compiled the facts. Some senators even took to quoting verbatim from his stories during Judiciary Committee hearings.

I ran into Jack on the street in New York City a week before the election. I thanked him for his wonderful work, and he promised to keep writing, to keep fighting the good fight, particularly if Bush won. Jack's passing is a huge loss for our community and for investigative journalism at large.

NAN ARON, *president*
Alliance for Justice

ACTIVE, NOT ACTIVISTS

New York Cdity

■ In "Rapping on Empty" [Jan. 10/17], Jody Rosen calls the Guerrilla News Network an "activist group." We are not an activist group. We are an independent news website and a TV production company (www.guerrillanews.com).

ANTHONY LAPPE
Editor, GNN.tv

CLARIFICATIONS

■ In "Debunking 'Centrism'" [Jan. 3], David Sirota describes Simon Rosenberg as having been a "free-trade lobbyist." Rosenberg has been a politically active advocate for free trade but not a professional registered lobbyist.

Also, in Micah L. Sifry's "The Rise of Open-Source Politics" [Nov. 22], the words, "Nor has it been coming from politicians, not until recently," were incorrectly placed inside a quote from Christopher Locke, who did not utter them.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Intolerable Cruelty

DANIEL LAZARE

On May 22, 1787, nine Quakers and three Anglicans gathered in a London print shop with the express purpose of doing something about the international slave trade. The trade was unspeakably cruel. Men, women and children were snatched from their homes and villages, force-marched hundreds of miles to coastal embarkation points and then crammed like sardines into the holds of fetid slave ships in which many would die of dysentery, smallpox and other diseases before ever seeing land again.

Yet the average Englishman paid no more mind to their suffering than to that of the poor barnyard animal he consumed for Sunday dinner. Such unpleasantness was far away, whereas the good things the slave trade wrought were close at hand. Slave profits fueled the economies of entire cities. They paid for the cathedral-like library at All Souls College, Oxford; for the elegant house on Wimpole Street where Robert Browning would court Elizabeth Barrett and for a growing number of sumptuous mansions dotting the English countryside. They even enabled a member of Parliament named Edward Colston to make a name for himself as a philanthropist in his hometown of Bristol. Declaring that "every helpless widow is my wife and her distressed orphans my children," Colston funded schools, churches, poorhouses and hospitals and provided for sermons to be preached on specified topics in local churches and the city jail. (Nearly two centuries later, a statue in his honor was erected in the center of Bristol.)

Given such abundant good works, was there anyone rude enough to point out how Colston made his money, which was by kidnapping real, live human beings and transporting them to Caribbean hellholes where the average slave perished after seven to ten years of forced labor?

Of course not. But then, following that fateful meeting in London, the scales fell from British eyes with remarkable speed. Within a few short years more than 300,000 people had joined a boycott of slave-grown sugar, and committees to abolish the slave trade were springing up in virtually every town and city, while Parliament was receiving more petitions on that subject than on any other. Slavery suddenly emerged as the hot topic du jour among London's popular debating societies. Within half a decade, the House of Commons had passed its first bill limiting the trade in human chattel, a rate of success that any modern human rights activist would envy.

Why were those twelve individuals so successful? One reason was simply the yawning gap between the reality of the slave trade and any semblance of Christian charity as perceived by the public. Britain dominated the international slave trade, and it wasn't just sailors, sea captains and businessmen who were in it up to their necks. Politicians and society ladies were too, as was the Church of England, which owned a plantation in Barbados where slaves were branded, fitted with iron collars and whipped when they tried to run away. Hypocrisy this monstrous couldn't help but shrivel when exposed to the light of day. As a consequence, the slave interests were immediately thrown on the defensive before a public that was shocked—shocked!—to discover what had been taking place under its nose for more than a century.

As Adam Hochschild points out in *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves*, the result was not only a highly effective public campaign but a new kind of politics, one that was humanitarian, extra-parliamentary, and middle class. Not only did the new

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Daniel Lazare is the author, most recently, of The Velvet Coup: The Constitution, the Supreme Court, and the Decline of American Democracy *(Verso). He is currently at work on a book about the politics of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.*

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movement take aim at individual consciences; it called on individuals to stir other consciences by adopting various signs of solidarity. "Think of what you're likely to find in your mailbox—or electronic mailbox—over a month or two," Hochschild writes. "An invitation to join the local chapter of a national environmental group. If you say yes, a logo to put on your car bumper. A flier asking you to boycott California grapes or Guatemalan coffee. A poster to put in your window...." A bumper sticker does not change the environment by itself, of course (particularly if it is attached to a fossil fuel–consuming, greenhouse gas–emitting automobile). But it announces that the driver has scoured his or her own soul and invites others to do likewise. All these elements, Hochschild argues, had their origin in this pioneering human rights crusade.

Because those original crusaders were modern, in other words, we are modern, and because they were progressive, we—which is to say the middle-class, book-buying public that Hochschild is targeting—are progressive as well. To which the critical reader can only reply with a querulous "yes, but...." Yes, fliers, posters and such are now ubiquitous. But are individuals, or broad social forces, responsible for historical change? Are people like the twelve London activists whom Hochschild spotlights "causative," as the sociologists say, or are they bit actors who strut briefly upon the historical stage?

Bury the Chains clearly implies the former. Hochschild, whose last book was the highly acclaimed *King Leopold's Ghost*, a study of colonial atrocities in the Belgian Congo, structures his tale as a middle-class epic filled with colorful characters determined to abolish what nearly everyone else took for granted. There is John Newton, a slave-ship captain who found religion, composed the famous hymn "Amazing Grace," but only woke up to the true horrors of his profession after his retirement; Olaudah Equiano, a slave who learned to read and write, purchased his own freedom and then wrote a memoir that became an international bestseller; a young divinity student named Thomas Clarkson, who became the new movement's first full-time employee; and Granville Sharp, a musician and autodidact who, when not defending the rights of London's growing population of free blacks, was dashing off pamphlets on everything from Greek grammar to biblical interpretation.

Hochschild tells their story well, cutting from one vivid portrait to another as the campaign unfolds. But while activists like these were undoubtedly committed and hardworking, what is most evident from his group portrait—whether he intended it or not—is how mixed their record actually was. Although they made a big splash at first, they were quickly overwhelmed by momentous historical events that were constantly erupting offstage. They exercised about as much control as a twig does over the flood bearing it downstream.

Morally, moreover, their legacy was more ambiguous than we might like to think. Not only were abolitionists silent about new forms of slavery that were springing up in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, most notably child labor in coal mines and factories, but, in a particularly ironic twist, the movement they created segued all too smoothly into the movement to colonize Africa directly. In 1839 a leading abolitionist, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, established a new organization whose title said it all: the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and the Civilization of Africa. The more Europeans inserted themselves into African affairs, the more Africa became a playground for their imperial ambitions. Shutting the door to one form of hypocrisy meant opening it to another.

BOOKS DISCUSSED IN THIS ESSAY

BURY THE CHAINS: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves.
By Adam Hochschild.
Houghton Mifflin. 468 pp. $26.95.

THE QUEEN'S SLAVE TRADER: John Hawkyns, Elizabeth I, and the Trafficking in Human Souls.
By Nick Hazlewood.
HarperCollins. 416 pp. $26.95.

THOUGH THE HEAVENS MAY FALL: The Landmark Trial That Led to the End of Human Slavery.
By Steven M. Wise.
Da Capo. 282 pp. $25.

AFRICAN VOICES OF THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE: Beyond the Silence and the Shame.
By Anne C. Bailey.
Beacon. 289 pp. $26.

Political conditions, in fact, were moving faster than any of the original participants realized. The initial London gathering came at a particularly favorable moment. The American Revolution a few years earlier had shaken up the establishment and invigorated reformers, who lost no time in taking advantage of the opening. But by 1792, when the French Revolution entered its radical phase under the leadership of the Jacobins, the window of opportunity began to close. Faced with a far more serious revolution on its very doorstep, the British establishment turned coldly hostile to the slightest suggestion of political change. Following an initial heady period of success, abolitionists and other reformers were persecuted, and political meetings effectively banned. A few years after that, another opportunity beckoned when Napoleon lost thousands of troops in a futile attempt to recapture the former French colony of Saint Domingue—today's Haiti—from slaves who had risen in revolt in 1791. With Napoleonic France suddenly in the proslavery camp, British abolitionists hastened to paint their cause in patriotic colors. Parliament, aware that British imperialism would need a more "enlightened" image if it was to succeed in the nineteenth century, voted to abolish the slave trade altogether in 1807. But then another deep freeze set in, and it wasn't until 1833 that Parliament got around to passing a bill abolishing slavery in the British West Indies in toto.

When change did occur, it was less the result of a few gentlemen in London than of (to use a time-honored word) the masses. The Haitian revolution, which terrified such paragons of liberty as Thomas Jefferson, was a sign that slaves could no longer be regarded as passive victims, a point reinforced by a series of powerful uprisings in British Caribbean possessions from 1816-32. At the height of the French Revolution, the Jacobins summarily abolished slavery in all French possessions overseas, and ordered French vessels in the Caribbean (including one dubbed *La Terroriste*) to begin harrying British and Spanish shipping. Remarkably, Hochschild faults Thomas Clarkson for putting his hopes in the French Revolution, comparing him to Communist fellow travelers who remained loyal to Stalin throughout the purges. He devotes just a couple of paragraphs to the struggle for popular suffrage in Britain in the early 1830s, describing it as "modeled on the drive for abolition" when, as Robin Blackburn shows in his magisterial volume *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery* (1988), it was a quasi revolution that went well beyond anything that middle-class abolitionists had in mind. Indeed, the famed abolitionist William Wilberforce was so frightened of the democratic volcano in his midst that, as Hochschild notes, he made plans to flee to the countryside "before the lava bursts forth."

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Hochschild concludes his study with a swipe at unnamed critics who complain, he says, that "all this fuss about the slaves in the West Indies helped distract the public from the oppression of labor at home." The statement is not footnoted, and it's hard to imagine whom Hochschild has in mind, since it has long been a tenet of the left that the struggle against wage slavery and the struggle against chattel slavery are inseparable. As Marx put it, "Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded." Still, there's no doubt that British humanitarianism was selective in terms of whom to feel sorry for and whom not to. Abolition did not succeed in Britain until it transcended the narrow middle-class moralism that Hochschild celebrates. If reformers are so ineffectual in Bush's America, perhaps it is because they have not transcended it either.

Nick Hazlewood's *The Queen's Slave Trader: John Hawkyns, Elizabeth I, and the Trafficking in Human Souls* is a far more tough-minded work. What gives it its bite is the fact that it deals with an otherwise heroic period in English history, one in which Protestant sea dogs were pulling the beard of Spain's Philip II, defending little England against his "Invincible Armada," and generally fighting the good fight against the royal absolutism that was threatening to engulf Europe. But less well known is that those same freedom-loving Protestants were angling all the while to break into the Spanish- and Portuguese-dominated slave trade.

Their motives are clear: While the risks were huge, the rewards were even greater. Spanish and Portuguese America suffered from an acute labor shortage, and, despite efforts to ban outsiders, there was every reason to believe that planters would pay a premium to anyone able to provide them with fresh slaves. The death of England's pro-Spanish Queen Mary in 1558 was a signal for English Protestants to leap into the breach. Four years later, a sea captain named John Hawkyns—although the history books usually render it "Hawkins," Hazlewood says the family more often spelled it with a "y"—prepared to do just that. Leaving Plymouth at the head of a small fleet, Hawkyns seized four Spanish ships off the Western Sahara before turning his attention to the more heavily populated estuaries, rivers and inlets to the south. Where the Spanish and Portuguese had already learned by this point to rely on local chiefs and kings to supply them with slaves, Hawkyns preferred a more direct approach. He and his crew simply pounced on anyone they spotted along the shore, dragging him from his home or fishing canoe and throwing him into the hold. Spying a vessel in today's Sierra Leone, he and his men clubbed the crew into submission, according to Portuguese accounts, and made off with both the ship and its cargo of up to 500 slaves, not to mention ivory, wax, and gold. He seized a Spanish vessel with 200 more slaves, a third boat with seventy and a fourth with sixty.

As the traffic in slaves illustrates, trade was a thinly veiled form of piracy and kidnapping.

Loaded to the gunwales, Hawkyns dashed across the Atlantic in an effort to sell off his captives before they perished from disease. He did not have permission to land in Spanish territory, he did not have a license to trade, his goods had not cleared customs and at least one of his ships was stolen. But by claiming that one of his ships needed repairs, he bluffed his way ashore and set up shop in what is now the Dominican Republic. After selling off a portion of his cargo, he sailed another thirty miles along the coast and began trading slaves for cattle hides. Finally, in June 1563, he set sail for home. Portuguese slave traders seized one of his ships on the way back, and Spanish authorities confiscated another. Still, says Hazlewood, the profits from the remaining cargo were enormous.

This is what international trade was like in the early modern period: a thinly veiled form of piracy and kidnapping. Hawkyns exhibited absolutely nothing of what we today would regard as a moral sense. Or, to put it another way, the only moral sense he displayed was one composed of equal parts religion, patriotism and egotism. If his efforts benefited England, hurt Catholic Spain and made him rich in the bargain, they were "good." If they didn't, they were "bad." This is not to say that the English of the sixteenth century were incapable of human sympathy. "If any African were carried away without their free consent," Elizabeth said of Hawkyns's first voyage, "it would be detestable and call down the vengeance of Heaven upon the undertakers." But Elizabeth had a change of heart once she realized how much money was at stake. Along with several of her top courtiers, the Queen signed on as a backer of Hawkyns's second voyage, providing him with a ship, the Jesus of Lubeck, for which she expected a full sixth of the profits in return.

Even the most jaded among us cannot help but be taken aback that Elizabeth, "the English Deborah," would lend her name to such an enterprise. But freedom in the sixteenth century was a zero-sum game: If England gained, then someone else had to lose, in this instance the Africans. Hawkyns's second haul was also considerable, although a third voyage, which he sent out under the command of a deputy (with Hawkyns's probable cousin, the young Francis Drake, as a member of the crew), ended badly when Spanish authorities prevented the ships from unloading their wares. On the other hand, a fourth voyage, which began in October 1567 with Hawkyns once again at the helm, started out on a much more promising note. After vandalizing a few Catholic shrines in the Canary Islands, he and his crew headed for West Africa, where they interceded in a tribal war and took up to 600 prisoners. Filled to the brim, Hawkyns once again headed for the Caribbean, where he succeeded in unloading a good portion of his cargo along what is today the Colombian-Venezuelan coast.

But then Hawkyns found himself in a tense standoff with a Spanish fleet near the Mexican port of Veracruz. He negotiated a truce that he trusted would hold until he finished repairing his ships. And it did hold, for a bit. But on a signal from their officers, Spanish sailors suddenly turned on the Englishmen with whom they had just been chatting and plunged knives deep into their chests. Up to 150 died. Aboard one of Hawkyns's ships, crewmen engaged in desperate hand-to-hand combat with 300 Spanish sailors trying to scramble aboard. As the English struggled to get away, Spanish cannon fire smashed through their fleet, sinking one vessel and crippling three others. Ultimately, the Spanish forced them to abandon their biggest ship, the aforementioned Jesus of Lubeck, laden with treasure and still carrying more than thirty valuable slaves. It was a cruel blow—for the English. For the slaves, of course, it was all supremely irrelevant. Regardless of which side won, their bondage would continue. Their only interest was in survival, in the most immediate sense of the word.

Hazlewood brilliantly reconstructs the chaotic struggle on land and sea that raged for some eight hours. He throws in some delightful touches, including a scene in which Hawkyns pauses mid-battle to order a beer and then, when a Spanish shot blows the cup away, declares, "Fear nothing! For God, who hath preserved me from this shot, will also deliver us from these traitors and villains!"

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It would make a fine Hollywood movie—if Hollywood had a sense of irony, that is. Although the historical data are sketchy, Hazlewood paints a persuasive portrait of Hawkyns as a brave, intelligent and resourceful man, but with the ethics of a thug. Given his brutality and ruthlessness, he would probably have done well as a modern-day *narcotraficante* or perhaps a member of George W. Bush's inner circle. Meanwhile, his ill-fated final voyage was a sign that England was not yet ready for the big leagues. Not until the 1650s, under Oliver Cromwell, would it re-emerge as a contender for naval supremacy.

If *The Queen's Slave Trader* deals with the beginning of England's involvement with the slave trade and Hochschild's *Bury the Chains* with its long denouement, then Steven Wise's *Though the Heavens May Fall* discusses the point in between, when the British began wrestling with the question of whether to confine slavery to the colonies or to permit its spread to the metropole. Unlike the settlers on the American mainland, few Caribbean planters had any intention of making the West Indies their home; instead, they returned to England at the first opportunity, using their new-found fortunes to set themselves up as country gentlemen. The problem was that many brought back black retainers, whom they persisted in treating as slaves. By 1680, servants like these had grown so numerous that it was said that a fashionable lady "hath always two necessary implements about her; a Blackamoor and a little dog." But what happened when such "blackamoors" ran off to London? Could their masters send out slave-catchers to track them down and bring them back? Could they whip them or ship them back to likely death in the West Indian cane fields? In 1569, in the case of an Englishman who had returned from Muscovy with a Russian slave, a court had supposedly ruled that "England was too pure an air for slaves to breathe in." But the only record of the case was a passing mention that another court had made of it some seventy years later. Was English air still too pure or had something happened in the interim to allow the institution of slavery to breathe free?

The upshot was a series of test cases culminating in a suit in November 1771 on behalf of a 31-year-old black man named James Somerset, who had run away but whose master had recaptured him and was now trying to ship him off to Jamaica. Was Somerset merely a bit of lost property or was he a free man being held against his will? Wise does a good job of guiding the reader through the thicket of eighteenth-century common law. One problem that Somerset and his supporters faced was the medieval law of "villeinage," still on the books even though it had long since fallen into disuse. If the courts decided that a slave was merely a modern-day villein, or serf, then his master might be legally entitled to transport him to Jamaica. But if the courts had decided that was the case, the consequences would have been explosive, since the legal status of English agricultural workers in general would also have been jeopardized. If black people could be enslaved under the law of villeinage, then they could too. In retrospect, it is clear that was not going to happen. If the day an English aristocrat flogs a pauper with a cat-o'-nine-tails is the day the English aristocracy's privileges came to an end, as Macaulay once wrote, then the day a common-law judge allowed a return to villeinage was the day the common law came to an end as well.

In southern Ghana, a former 'slave coast,' discussion of the slave trade arouses not so much resentment as shame and disdain.

Hence, it was more or less inevitable that Lord Mansfield, the judge in the Somerset case, would decide on June 22, 1772, that villeinage did not apply and that slavery was "so odious" that, unless Parliament specifically legalized it, it was incompatible with English common law. Nearly 200 black Londoners celebrated a few days later with a ball in a pub not far from Westminster Hall.

Wise, an attorney who has taught at Harvard and other law schools, clearly enjoys a good tangle, and his enthusiasm for the legal ins and outs of the Somerset case is engaging. Still, there is something very American about his unqualified admiration for English common law. Only in the United States, where the Constitution is worshiped with religious veneration, could a legal historian fail to see the problem with disallowing slavery purely on the basis of local, customary, organic law. Mansfield did not rule that slavery was inhumane or undemocratic, merely that it was unconstitutional in England alone. Rather than striking a blow at slavery, he merely clarified the ground rules by specifying where it was permitted under the British crown and where it was not. In a sense, Somerset invited Englishmen to do abroad what they could not do at home, which is one reason slavery would continue in the British West Indies for another six decades and in British India for another nine. Even at its most liberal, the English common-law tradition was an intensely insular and conservative one (just as the American constitutional tradition is today). What it gave with one hand, it took away with the other.

Anne Bailey's *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade* is a remarkable effort to present the slave trade from a perspective very different from what we are used to—not that of slavery's liberal opponents or even of the slaves themselves but of the Africans from whose midst the slaves were taken. Bailey, who teaches African history at Spelman College in Atlanta, is herself of Afro-Caribbean extraction and has spent several years doing research along the stretch of southern Ghana once known as the Slave Coast. According to liberal mythology, what she should have found there was a society still reeling from the trauma of the slave trade or, according to black nationalist mythology, one still seething with resentment over the hurt inflicted by the imperialist West. Instead, she found a highly stratified society determined to avoid the topic altogether. As Bailey pressed more and more deeply, the most common response she elicited was one of shame and disdain. Descendants had changed their names to avoid the stigma of having a slave ancestor, while would-be tribal chiefs had reportedly been disqualified because questions were raised about possible slaves in their family tree. Bailey adds, "It is almost a crime to say to someone in Ewe [a local language], 'Togbuiwo nye amefefleor Mamawo nye amefefle'"—they bought your grandfather or grandmother. Indeed, "it is much more permissible to confess to some connection to slave traders—but an absolute taboo to mention slave ancestry." Better a victimizer, in other words, than a victim.

Strange as this may seem, it is no different from the English taking pride in the exploits of a John Hawkyns, which they did until recently. Meanwhile, Bailey notes that if slavery had long been a feature of West African society, there is no doubt that the Europeans raised it to a whole new level. The terms of trade were vastly unequal. Europeans encouraged their African suppliers to range deep into the interior. To pay for the slaves they brought out, the English alone supplied them with more than a million guns over the years, a vast arsenal that helped fuel the growth of powerful slave states such as the Asante. A growing emphasis on the slave trade caused other activities such as cattle breed-

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ing, farming and fishing to wither, sending local economies into a downward spiral. Nor did conditions improve after the Europeans began shutting down the trade in the early nineteenth century—in some ways, they got worse. The old supply networks continued to function, flooding the coastal tribes with slaves they could no longer sell. Domestic slavery rose as a result, with ever more poisonous consequences for African society. When a Danish military detachment tried to suppress the slave trade in the 1840s, one tribe, the Anlos, furious at this latest European about-face, rose in revolt. All the Anlos knew is that the Europeans had encouraged them to adopt a certain way of life and now were trying to take it away.

Bailey is scrupulously objective in making her way through the resulting political minefield. Although the Europeans were obviously in control, she does not absolve the Africans of responsibility. While not rejecting the call for reparations altogether, she argues that real reparations would enable West Africa to grow and modernize so that it would have both the economic and political ability to wrestle with the legacy of slavery in all its various permutations and combinations.

The task, needless to say, is not an easy one, as a photograph reproduced in *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade* seems to suggest. It's an ordinary tourist snapshot, showing the author with members of an African tour group at a slave site in downtown Accra. But one thing about it stands out. While Bailey, tall, slender and fashionably dressed, is smiling warmly, the others are solemn to the point of scowling. I found my response to this photo changing the more I studied it. At first, it seemed to capture a well-earned sense of resentment on the Africans' part at yet another painful Western intrusion into their affairs. But then it occurred to me that what it showed was not African resentment so much as the beaming self-confidence of a citizen of the advanced, industrialized West who goes out of her way to grapple with difficult problems that others try to avoid. Where others see trouble, she sees an opportunity. People like Anne Bailey make us uncomfortable, which is all to the good. ■

The Moviegoer

LEE SIEGEL

THE WHOLE EQUATION: A History of Hollywood. By David Thomson. Knopf. 402 pp. $27.95.
THE NEW BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF FILM. By David Thomson. Knopf. 989 pp. Paper. $22.95.

If Herbert Marcuse and Senator Joseph McCarthy had gone to a movie together in the late 1950s—and that could only happen in a movie—they would have walked out, probably not together, and demanded their money back. The left-wing Frankfurt School intellectuals and the red-hunting McCarthyites shared a passion: They deeply mistrusted the Hollywood "dream factory."

Their different notions of exactly what that dream was amount to a kind of cosmic disjunction. Figures like Adorno and Marcuse saw in Hollywood's mass appeal a subtle and insidious imposition of capitalist conformity. For them, it was like a totalitarianism from within. Hollywood's happy endings filled them with repelled foreboding. For that matter, Hollywood's toothless social criticism filled them with repelled foreboding. The blacklisting members of the House Un-American Activities Committee, on the other hand, overlooked the sunny finales. They saw only the Communist affiliations or left-leaning sympathies of some screenwriters, and they considered Hollywood's soppy, sentimental defenses of the hard-pressed little guy against the plutocratic big guys coded insinuations of austere revolutionary goals. For the red-baiters, American movies represented a totalitarianism creeping in from without.

I'm not suggesting a moral equivalence between the Frankfurt School and HUAC, only observing that in America, one person's simple entertainment is another person's impending moral and intellectual crisis. Movies have long been a magnet for scrutiny, hysteria or moral panics, though obviously television now draws much of that dubious attention. Still, nothing can get commentators and even politicians going like a Hollywood movie. Consider Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, made mostly with Gibson's money but also with funds from investors, and released by a large theatrical distributor—thus, like many so-called "indies," a Hollywood movie in all but name. *The Passion of the Christ* represents a strange historical irony, because it was precisely the type of Catholic conservatism animating Gibson's controversial blockbuster that inspired McCarthy's tirades against Hollywood movies. And was there a connection, orchestrated or not, between this movie's appearing just before the launch of a Republican presidential campaign that emphasized, in the appropriate venues, the kind of fundamentalist Christian values the film espoused?

The question of film's influence on psyche and society is about as old as the movies themselves, and David Thomson is one of the handful of critics gifted enough to address it. Unaccountably, though, those looking for that kind of scrutiny in Thomson's unstructured, seemingly barely edited mess of a book aren't going to find it, unless they look very hard indeed. Strictly speaking, *The Whole Equation* isn't so much a history of Hollywood as a very impressionistic response to Hollywood's unique confluence of art and money, a marriage arranged by the men who ran the studios. And Thomson tells Hollywood's story by following the money, from Louis B. Mayer's nickelodeon empire to his purchase of the distribution rights to D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, which inspired Mayer to go into the movie business whole hog. From there Thomson swings through the rise of the big studios in the 1920s and '30s, to their decline due to television in the 1950s, followed by a brief uptick in quality in the 1960s and '70s, and up to our own time. Today, he argues, we are in a moribund period for film, a moment when the stories of Hollywood's golden age, from the 1930s to the early 1950s, have been replaced by special effects and vapid characters.

I can't think of a major film critic over the past twenty-five years—the late Pauline Kael, or Andrew Sarris, or J. Hoberman—who would argue with Thomson, but he seems more weary of contemporary movies than anyone else. And *The Whole Equation* is marred by its weariness. Like Kael, Thomson cherishes the popular aspect of movies; however, Thomson—an Englishman who has spent much of his adult life in San Francisco—has much too cool a sensibility to share Kael's visceral responses. His description of his friend the screenwriter Robert Towne (*Chinatown*) is an accurate characterization of Thomson's own noir-gloomy, macho-aesthete style, which he has cultivated the way an American actor cultivates a singular persona: Towne "has a way of being that is casual but intimate,

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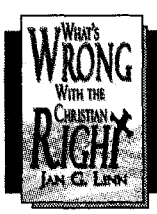
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like the best sort of naturalistic acting.... Its ease and attractiveness, and its worldliness are deep at the heart of his book's subject." Unlike Kael, too, Thomson is very much the *auteurist*, though, in keeping with his sang-froid, more skeptical about the director's authority than is Sarris, the *auteur* theory's best-known American exponent. Thomson's true *auteur*, in fact, seems to be the studio executive, or the studio executives of yore, anyway. One of the representative figures in *The Whole Equation* is Monroe Stahr, the hero of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon*. Fitzgerald modeled Stahr on Irving Thalberg, the head of production at MGM from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s. The phrase "the whole equation" is from Fitzgerald's novel—"not half a dozen men have ever been able to keep the whole equation of pictures in their heads." For Thomson, such a person was embodied by moguls like Thalberg and Lew Wasserman, and by Charlie Chaplin, who controlled every aspect, aesthetic and financial, of his films.

Thomson himself has trouble keeping the disparate elements of his book in his head, or under control. His chapters are like different camera angles on the same landscape, each one taking a subject and attempting to develop a new theme—Chaplin's loneliness and narcissism; the saga of Erich von Stroheim's 1924 epic *Greed*; the influence of studio budgets; Thomson's (incredibly fanciful) connection between movies, which allow you to fall in love with a stranger, and the rising rate of divorce. Yet the particularity of each chapter dissolves in a blurry haze of aperçus that could appear in any other chapter.

The Whole Equation purports to offer a history of Hollywood, but this little epic of a big American business seems to consist mostly of random thoughts jotted down on cocktail napkins at Spago. Vapid generality—"Very subtly, a democratic society begins to be treated as an audience or a mass, and so it goes"—alternates with sentences that make Derrida at his most opaque look like *Newsday*—"And the concentration camps are often spoken of as factories of death, places where the urge toward genocide, or unkindness, was subjected to modern ergonomics, the search for greater efficiency." Never mind that unkindness is a less than apt description of what took place in Auschwitz, or that in the concentration camps the urge to genocide was not subjected to anything. No one responsible for planning the Final Solution ever said anything about making a better office chair. This book can be maddening.

Which is a shame. To go from *The Whole Equation* to Thomson's classic *Biographical Dictionary of Film* is to experience two different categories of writing. The earlier book is magnificent and necessary. It's like a great novel about Hollywood; all it lacks is a plot. On Pierce Brosnan and Rene Russo in *The Thomas Crown Affair*: "He looked like a stick being toyed with by a lush cat." And on Billy Wilder, whom Thomson appreciates, but appraises with his characteristically cool, worldly, weary eye (and with a sly allusion to Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*): "As it is, too often I feel he's dead, or lost, to the life of his films, a grinning corpse floating on top, preserved by sardonic fluids and voice-over." Make that a devastating weariness.

Just released in a revised edition as *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film*, Thomson's *Dictionary* is a masterpiece of rich insight into the culture of movie-making. That's not to say the book isn't full of bizarre judgments. About Marlon Brando's ontologically pure performance in *On the Waterfront*, Thomson writes, "Today...it is hardly possible to be moved by [Brando] in *On the Waterfront* for noticing the vast technical trick he is performing." That seems just plain cuckoo. And what "trick" might that be? Thomson never says.

But then Thomson's idiosyncratic brilliance asserts itself. Reflecting on Brando's famous scorn for film, Thomson wonders if there was "something in Brando that found so much pretending unwholesome or dishonorable? In his withdrawal, as much as in his best work, he has altered the way we think of acting." It's such a simple-seeming question to ask about Brando, obvious even, but no one thinks to ask it. And Thomson's suggestion that Brando's discomfort with artifice has swayed our conception of acting resonates broadly. Was Brando's distance from his craft even as he practiced it responsible for an evolution in American irony? Did his calculated eccentric embellishments of a character—an English accent here, a woman's dress there—undermine his famous naturalism, and certify American audiences' innate mistrust of art's attempt to imitate life? Maybe Stanley Kowalski lurks behind reality television. Thomson has a poet's inferring touch.

The best parts of *The Whole Equation* lie in such suggestive formulations. Thomson beautifully writes, "what is film noir but the night with shadows?" He turns a phrase about the "crusty moral realism that kept Lillian Gish from being glamorous," which sets you thinking. The British philosopher T.E. Hulme once said that romanticism was

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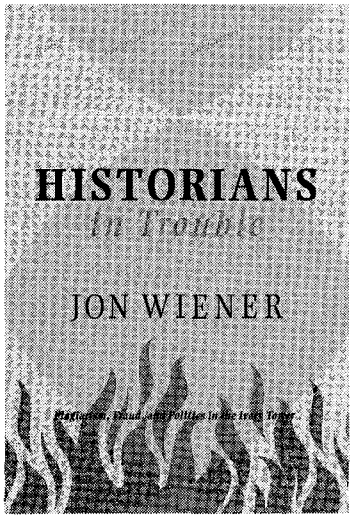

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spilled religion; glamour is spilled romanticism, and there is something morally depleted about glamour. Yet vast numbers of people across the world sit rapt before glamorous images. Is glamour, therefore, a world problem? As I write these lines, AOL news presents its readers with this top headline: "Pitt, Aniston Split; Stay Friends." Under that comes the section "More News," where the headline reads: "Tsunami Toll Tops 150,000." That is a kind of sickness. Or is it elitist, antidemocratic and smug to say so?

It would be good if mainstream movie reviews took up those questions about the nature of moviehood, good if they cast into a new idiom Dwight Macdonald's old categories of masscult and midcult. Your highly influential newspaper film review really should not, in fact, be a review at all, but a reflection on the vastly extended culture of movies and movie celebrity. Film critics working for powerful newspapers could approach a movie the way a good reporter approaches a political figure or event, with detachment and dogged skepticism. But, as Thomson gratifyingly points out, newspapers are too dependent on revenue from movie-industry advertising to publish too many honest considerations of film.

Thomson is far more lenient toward Hollywood's own pursuit of the buck, and he's right to be so. Art has never been disentangled from commerce, and from the beginning Hollywood was about commerce before it was about art. For Thomson, the "whole equation" of Hollywood is, simply, the aspiration "to be show business and art at the same time." Or, as he also puts it, "the urge to tell [movie] stories is inseparable from the wish to make money." Maybe, in the end, the desire to camouflage that wish behind the pretense of an idealized populist decency is what is responsible for all those Hollywood movies about the hard-pressed little guy up against plutocratic big guys.

Sober and worldly, Thomson's book is both a disenchanted defense of the movies and a wearily, stubbornly enchanted grievance about same. For Thomson, his buddy Robert Towne's *Chinatown* is a metaphor for Hollywood's trade-offs, what with its story of how greed and the crime of incest created Los Angeles and all its big-city opportunities. (Thomson's worldliness is sometimes an implausible pose; to a great extent, he has assimilated Hollywood's ambience of implausibility.) On the one hand, as Thomson sees it, the bottom line looms too large in Hollywood to bear out studio executives' self-deluded claims of commitment to any kind of artistic vision. But the urge to create storytelling magic also remains too strong among some Hollywood figures to entirely squash hopes of making emotionally and even intellectually satisfying films, if not works of art.

And money is not always the enemy of those ambitions. While it's hard to share Thomson's inexplicable raptures over Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter*, studio executives threw $15 million at Cimino to help him realize his (crude, cynical, puerile) vision of the Vietnam War and Vietnam-era America. It's not that money unfailingly corrupts art in Hollywood; it's that movie money is often drawn to mediocre art; and hyper-socialized hustlers, not introspective deep-feelers, are often drawn to movie-making. But Thomson can also cite a score of artistic triumphs like *The Godfather* and *Blue Velvet* (the latter produced, he notes, by "one of the ancient whores of the picture business, Dino De Laurentiis") that dipped deep into Hollywood's pockets while surviving its stupefying embrace.

In other words, Hollywood's sullying innocence and soiled idealism fit neatly into the parameters of American society—and vice versa. The larger the audience sought, the more the gravitational pull of higher numbers bends the quality of art. That could change. It could be that home videos and DVDs will someday allow movies to ignore the mass market altogether and bypass onerous distribution arrangements; maybe such films will, like books, acquire the integrity of a solitary art. Yet nothing in America that is meant to please even a small number of people seems to stay un-mass for long if it's successful.

Thomson is good, if somewhat dense, on the changing economics of Hollywood. (*The Movie Business Book*, just published in its third edition, is the best source for information about the green behind the silver screen.) But he's mainly interested in the movies' social and psychological nature, and he has many interesting, sometimes fascinating things to say in this regard about silent film ("in silent pictures characters actually talk a good deal of the time") and about filmmakers like Griffith and Stroheim, and about the human event that was Chaplin. On Chaplin's womanizing, Thomson is at his noirest and most macho: "Charlie fucked like a very wealthy man with an utterly private life." Infelicitous as that sentence may be, it presents a caustic paraphrase of celebrity. Thomson is at his best when he's exercising his gift for looking, as if for the first time, at worn, familiar phenomena like celebrity—and sex.

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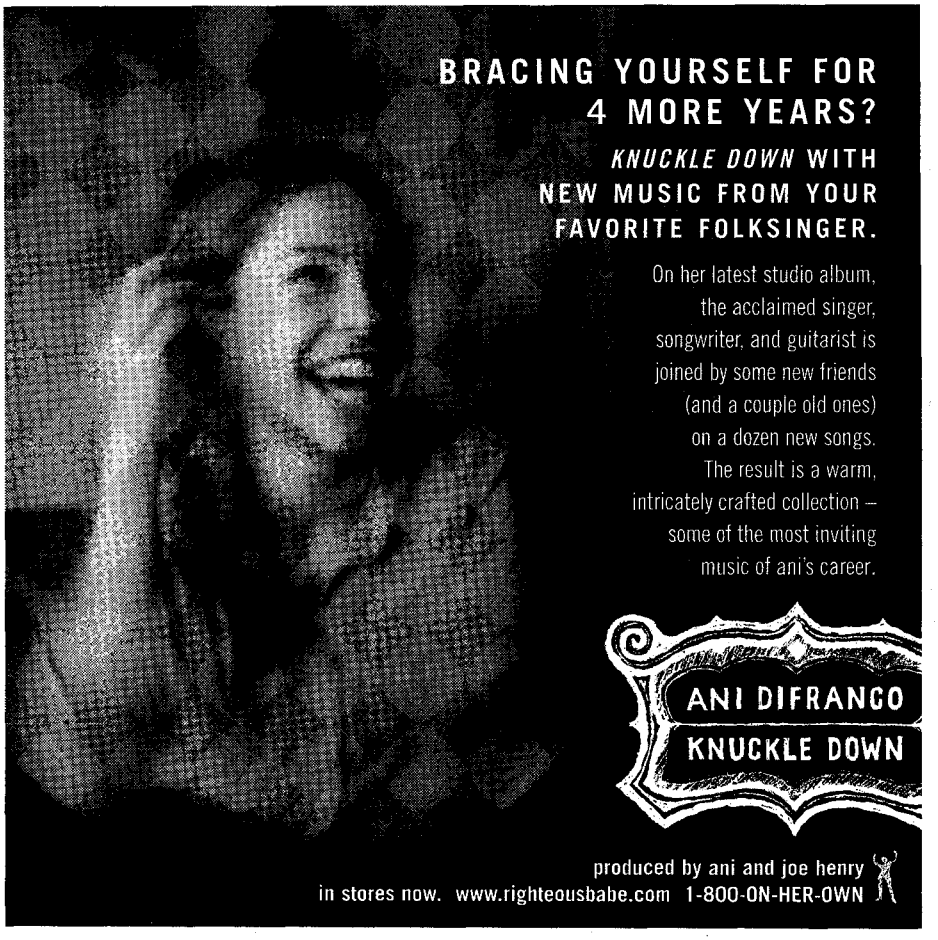
There's plenty of talk about sex in movies. There is no talk, however, about sex in the culture of movie-making. Yet the sexual opportunities available to most Hollywood scriptwriters, directors, actors and producers go way beyond the experience of the average, non-Hollywood American. Movies are often used to explain society, as if they were mediated yet fairly clear reflections of social experience. But behind the movies is a special society, trapped in its particular experience, that explains the movies.

Thomson is very explicit about the expectation, on the part of the old (and no doubt some of the new) Hollywood moguls, of sex from ambitious young actresses, especially the act of fellatio. With a kind of flaunted candor, Thomson writes in a discussion of Louis B. Mayer's conduct with young starlets: "Joan Crawford swallowed her share of cum, and her lips shone in close-ups. How do you think lip gloss got invented?" I'm not sure what the cosmetics industry would say about this—it would probably depend on whom they were talking to. And in an odd Barthesian turn, Thomson suggests that those names, often invented by male studio executives, that ended in an open vowel—Garbo, Harlow, Monroe—had something to do with that expectation. Whatever you make of his conceit, you see what he's getting at. (Bogey and Coop's lips certainly never shone.) Hollywood and Hollywood movies have always revolved, and still revolve, around what men want, expect, demand from women. Of course, such desires aren't exclusive to Hollywood. (Recall the Lewinsky scandal; though whereas Hollywood is libertine, sex in the nation's capital is a hypocritical mix of lasciviousness and prudery.) But they have a formative influence in Hollywood, the likes of which are rarely found outside Hollywood, whose products radically shape society. (Think Monica, from Beverly Hills.)

The effect of Hollywood's portrayal of sex as both the literal and symbolic center of existence is incalculable, especially the political effect. The tacit bargain used to be that working-class and middle-class Americans expected, in exchange for playing by the rules, that the popular culture they turned to for relaxation would reflect back to them positive images of people who played by the rules. Or at the very least they wouldn't be made to feel foolish or excluded for dutifully following the rules. The function of a generation of romantic comedies à la Doris Day, and sitcoms à la *The Honeymooners* or *The Dick Van Dyke Show* was to ennoble disappointment, limitations, and the postponement—sometimes



FROM LOVE IN THE TIME OF WAR

Tonight, the old hard work of love
has given up. I can't unbutton promises
or sing secrets into your left ear
tuned to quivering plucked strings.

No, please. I can't face the reflection
of metal on your skin & in your eyes,
can't risk weaving new breath into war fog.
The anger of the trees is rooted in the soil.

Let me drink in your newly found river
of sighs, your way with incantations.
Let me see if I can't string this guitar

& take down your effigy of moonlight
from the cross, the dogwood in bloom
printed on memory's see-through cloth.

Yusef Komunyakaa

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forever—of gratification. There's scarcely any delay between a wish and its fulfillment in today's movies, where beautiful-looking people are regularly, and graphically, gratifying themselves with other beautiful-looking people. The decline of the sitcom means that the terms of the old tacit bargain are slowly being ignored on the small screen, too, which is an even more consequential development, given that medium's domestic immediacy.

Frankness in popular entertainment about sex and hidden motives is hardly a negative development, so long as free and gifted minds are behind it. But if you are still wondering what happened last November, and you are tired of hearing all the abstract, mind-numbing blather about red states and blue states, consider the consequences of Hollywood's projection of its own narrow experience into the precious leisure time of its audiences. For many Americans, the promise of instant wealth is a lot more plausible (the market may go your way) than the promise of carnal or romantic gratification (you are who you are). So if Hollywood types, who supported the recent Democratic presidential candidate and his blowsy, post-coital-looking wife, are breaking the sexual rules, you might as well go with his more regular-looking rival, who disdains sexual promiscuity but favors dramatic military violence, and also winkingly implies that he is going to let everybody break the economic rules as a kind of moral corrective to all the sexual rules—i.e., the tacit bargain—that are being shattered.

Thomson himself is hardly a moralizer, as you may have noticed, though he is a caustic, jaded moralist. The conversation about the nature of Hollywood movies usually proceeds along the cloudy, banal lines of "moral values." But looking plainly at the sociology of Hollywood, or at elements of filmmaking that don't lend themselves to easy polemical formulations, yields a lot more insight into how we are living. What is the social effect of close-ups edging out shots of people interacting in a definite environment, or of a jumpy camera or digitized effects overwhelming reality as opposed to a steady camera subordinate to the visible world? How has movie music affected our patience with trying, unscored moments in life? (The iPod is our way of scoring our otherwise uneventful days.) What does it mean that films, unlike plays, are shot out of chronological sequence? How does that influence an actor's style, and how do the actors influence us? Or do they?

The subject of acting almost never comes up in any extended way in commentary on the movies. But the art of acting is at the heart of nearly all popular entertainment, and movies and television obviously would not exist without actors. Thomson takes some halfhearted stabs at acting, suggesting—with startling ignorance and ludicrous alarm—that Method acting's emphasis on the actor's own experience is "a nonsense that could yet destroy a society, as well as an approach that drags down art or storytelling or entertainment." You wonder what Thomson is thinking when he watches Pacino, perhaps the Method's purest product, utterly obliterate himself in the role of Michael Corleone. But maybe Thomson falls back on the tough-guy-prophet tone because it's even harder to talk about acting than about music. There's simply no vocabulary for it, and there are no stable criteria for how to evaluate acting, except for the very vague standard of being true to life. Which sounds fine until you realize that it's an aspiration diametrically at odds with the whole idea of "acting."

And so Thomson rushes past aesthetic considerations to what he regards as acting's social consequences. "The new model for humanity," he declares, in that same prophetic tone, "becomes the actor, with his infinite variety." He adds that "many of us become a little more like actors, waiting for a fresh part, a new start." He asks (with cocktail-napkin infelicity): "Is the only way to behave naturally now to act?" The idea that we've all become actors is what currently passes for advanced commentary on the effects of film-acting on American life.

But Americans are very lightly bound by deference to prescribed social forms, and this means that they are less calculating in their self-presentation than the citizens of any other society you can think of. Americans don't play "roles" to the extent that a British, French, Japanese or Saudi Arabian person will play a role in ordinary life. That's why great American actors, unlike great British actors, rarely lose themselves in their characters, and perhaps why they achieve such iconic power abroad. Actors who became stars—Hepburn, Monroe, Brando, Pacino, Nicholson—play some version of what we have come to think of as themselves at the same time as they play a particular part. (Hepburn is almost always a sophisticate; Nicholson usually some kind of outsider; Pacino—since *The Godfather*—often a towering figure of evil, etc.) Ever since Brando's tics and embellishments sabotaged the Method's naturalism, American actors have found ways to remind us that they're still themselves—still true to life—under the enchantments of art.

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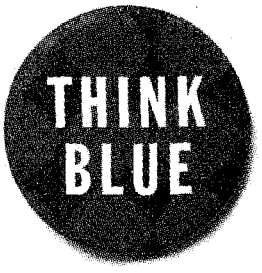

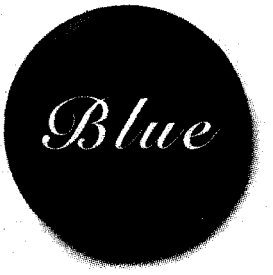

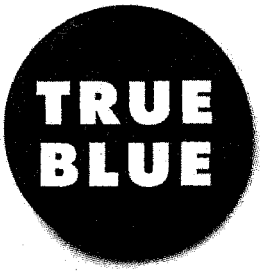

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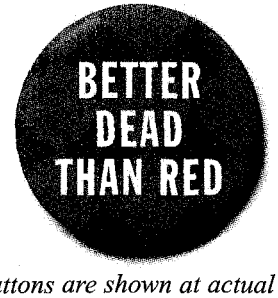

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In fact, American acting's suspicion of pretense and its stubborn adherence to the lifelike strengthen Americans' mistrust of artistic fictions. Hollywood's true meaning lies not in the fabrication of illusion but in some ultimate contempt for the imagination. For all of film's super-mega-hyper fantasies and fantastic effects, for all its probably subtle influences on behavior, it leaves audiences unable to conceive of any other kind of life than the one they're being officially urged to live. That doesn't mean that portentous Marcuse was more than superficially accurate in his perceptions. But it is conclusive proof that, with regard to Hollywood's capacity to inspire us to reimagine our lot in life, McCarthy was as much in the dark as any moviegoer. ■

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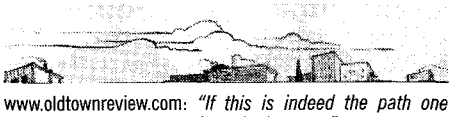

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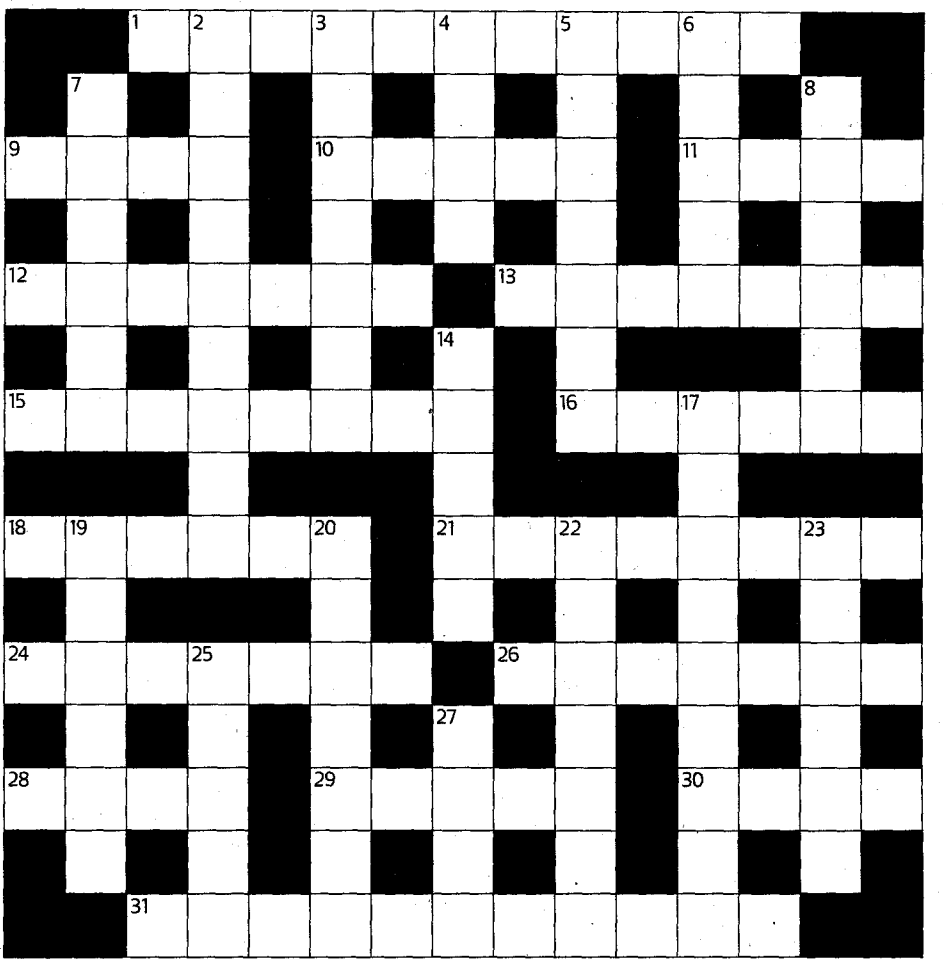

ACROSS

1 Describing a cuckoo place that is bound to be full of holes. (5,6)

9, 11 and **10** Even on the right course, it needs a word of warning, with the selection of cards showing determined effort. (8,5)

12 It involves paperwork if I'd get in the wrong way. (7)

13 Long John suggested we shiver when considering his. (7)

15 Possibly abused in evenhanded fashion. (8)

16 You have to catch the bus coming back, and since the bed is not made correctly, one is not quite ready to come out. (6)

18 Possibly a gun to load with candy? (6)

21 See 4 down

24 Has enough money to spend for fads, it seems. (7)

26 Did clever tricks, although a bit undersized. (7)

28 See 7 down

29 A race wherein they supposedly come out fighting for place in the field? (5)

30 Sometimes one hears a roomer is not supposed to be pretty. (4)

31 The place where we ask for a drink is provided with a malt beverage, and we expect to find reduced prices there. (7,4)

DOWN

2 Contending with what one in trouble might do with his hands, lest you get it upset inside. (9)

3 They may go on the house, and I would get what the confessor does around it. (7)

4, 19 and **21** across A bit of what the sculptor made of granite, just like Father! (4,3,3,3,5)

5 When your friends don't work out, who needs these? (See, mine could be very unfriendly!) (7)

6 A title of respect but I bash it around a bit! (5)

7 and **28** across What three nursery characters sailed off in might go "klippety-klop." (6,4)

8 Part of the meal is a small type forest product. (6)

14 For a special purpose, sort of had a little firm upbringing. (2,3)

17 Having two tongues, and able to use either rather well. (9)

19 See 4

20 Making hay, Mr. Kennedy has the sound of a ringer! (7)

22 Rapidly gets away from things like moats. (7)

23 The old king is about to bring a modern queen up, but it's rather a racy mixture. (6)

25 Works in the old way to get a stage production. (5)

27 As a girl, I am shortly to be found on the up and up—not well cast in 25. (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2973

		W	R	O	N	G	N	U	M	B	E	R		
	B		E		O		E		O		A		R	
M	O	T	J	U	S	T	E		R	I	S	Q	U	E
	O		E		E		D		O		E		N	
C	H	I	C	A	G	O		A	C	I	D	I	F	Y
	O		T		A		A		C				O	
H	O	M	I	L	Y		F	O	O	T	S	O	R	E
			O				T				T			
S	T	A	N	D	S	T	O		R	E	A	S	O	N
	O				C		N		E		N		F	
S	K	Y	S	A	I	L		C	A	R	D	I	F	F
	N		L		E		S		D		U		I	
P	O	T	I	O	N		P	R	O	S	P	E	C	T
	W		P		C		O		U		T		E	
		O	S	T	E	N	T	A	T	I	O	N		

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*Source: "Lighting the Way to Energy Savings"; 1999

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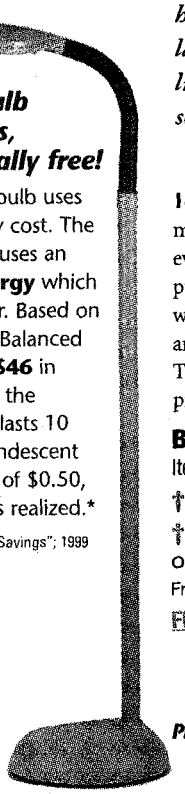

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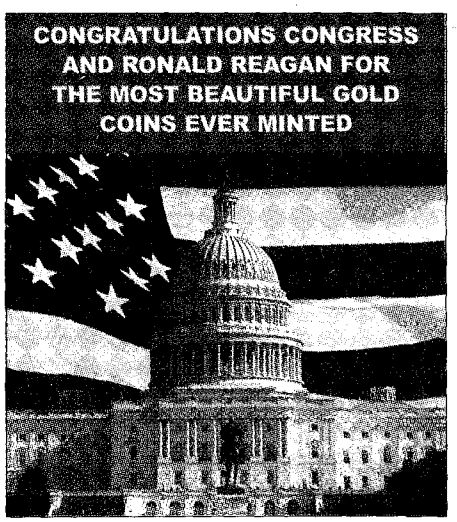

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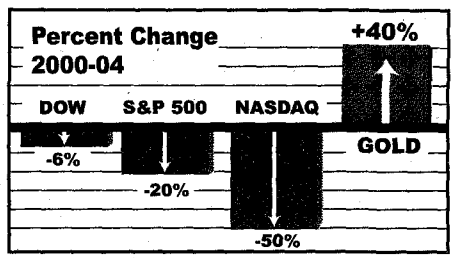

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